

空塾一樹

イラスト
児玉西

isekai quest ha houkago ni!

異世界クエストは 放課後に!!

クールな先輩が
オレの前だけ
笑顔になる
ようです

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Isekai Quest After School!

vol.1

by Sorano Kazuki

[Novel Updates](#)

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せ、先輩、
性格変わりすぎじゃ
ないですか!?

地球

異世界

異世界クエストは
放課後に!

クールな先輩が
オレの敵だけ
実敵になる
ようです



ニーナ

風也を慕う宿屋の娘。
突如風也の側に現れた牛紐に、
対抗意識を燃やす。

宗谷 貫

全土を平定した素人。
地球では登山部で、
自然を破壊するため異世界を訪れる。

琴路 泉

小説家を自指し、
ネオ集めのために異世界を訪れる。
異とはけんかするほど仲が良いの典型。

御子戸 千統

学校では寄りがたいクール系少女。
だが、異世界では天然ガリを弄弄し、
素の明るい表情を見せる。

津守 風也

普段は劣えない高校生だが、
異世界では凄腕の剣士。
二人で冒険するようになつてから、
天然な先輩には毎回振り回され気味。

「や、やったあああああああ！
やった！ やったわ！
津守君、倒せたー?！」
飛び上がった千紘は駆け寄ってくると、
こちらを抱き締めてきた。
甘い匂いと柔らかな感触に、
風也の心臓は跳ね上がる。



Prologue

“You see, I am God.”

Those were the first words said by the girl who appeared out of nowhere.

I looked around, but there was nothing in my surroundings. The only thing I could see was darkness.

“There is something I would like to ask of you. Are you willing to grant my request?”

The self-proclaimed 『God』 gave a bright, charming smile and said that.

And that was... how everything began.

Chapter 1 – To Another World and Back Again

On that day, Tsugami Kazaya had once again traveled to another world as per his usual routine.

“An Orc Knight... It appeared just as I thought.”

It looked a lot like a pig that walked on two legs. It held a longsword in one hand, and was wearing simple armor.

Judging by the way it glared in his direction while breathing heavily through its nose, it was definitely not friendly.

However, the same held true for Kazaya as well. Kazaya was here to defeat him (or maybe her, it was hard to tell) after all.

All of a sudden, the Orc Knight kicked off from the ground. It let out a wild scream, raised the sword above its head, and swung it down.

Under ordinary circumstances, it was a blow that should have cleaved his body in two while creating a spray of blood.

However, when the tip of the sword was close to making contact with Kazaya's head, a sharp sound rang out and sparks flew.

The opponent's blade was stopped mid-swing, as though it had hit an invisible wall.

The Orc Knight snorted several times as if it was dissatisfied and tried to force its way through, but there was no way brute force would work.

Kazaya glanced diagonally upwards, and looked at what appeared to be a cylindrical bar that was floating horizontally in mid air. It looked exactly like a HP bar display that you would see in a game.

The bar was displaying a red color, and the size was so small that you had to strain your eyes to see it.

“It’s useless. Such attacks won’t work on me.”

Kazaya said that with confidence and stretched his arm outwards.

“Ye heavenly weapon that cuts through all of creation, appear in my hand— Azure Sky King!”

As soon as he said that, particles of light appeared in mid air, concentrated at one point, and created a sword. The sword was easily longer than his own size, and it was a bulky and brutish weapon.

Kayaza grabbed the hilt of that greatsword with both hands and lifted it up. Despite the size, it was not all that heavy. Atmost, it was as heavy as a light dumbbell.

Seeing him ready his weapon, the Orc Knight visibly faltered.

“Evil demonic beast that brings harm to mankind! By my authority, I hereby judge you guilty!”

Kazaya took a single step forward, raised the greatsword 『Azure Sky King』 up high, and swung it down with a yell.

The Orc Knight reflexively tried to defend against that strike with its own weapon.

The loud noise from the impact lasted only for a moment. Kazaya’s greatsword snapped the other weapon cleanly in two and cut straight through the opponent’s body as well, armor and all.

A cry of agony rang out. The Orc Knight fell down to its knees while wavering, and then slowly collapsed.

“Don’t think badly of me. This... was for the sake of destiny as well.”

Kazaya took a deep breath and threw the greatsword into the air. It immediately changed into particles of light and vanished.

At the same time, he heard a loud sound coming from above his head. It was similar to the sound effect that was heard in old RPGs when the player’s character levelled up.

When he moved his finger through the air as if tracing something, a

rectangular screen appeared in front of him. There were several bars similar to the one from earlier on that display, and there was a number at the top of the screen.

“Alright, mission accomplished! I got a decent bit of experience and leveled up too. It looks like it’ll still take a while until I learn any new skills , though....”

After confirming that, Kazaya moved his finger in the opposite direction, causing the screen to disappear.

Confirming that with a glance, he reached into his chest pocket and took a cube-shaped item that looked like a dice, opened a small hatch on one side, and pointed it at the fallen Orc Knight.

Immediately after he did that, its body vanished and the sphere of light that was left behind was sucked into the box.

He closed the hatch and returned the item to his chest pocket. With this, all the work was done. The only thing left to do was to return.

However—at that instant, he heard a faint scream coming from somewhere far away. It was clearly the scream of a human.

There were no ordinary humans here. Any humans here would be existences similar to himself.

“Could it be, a new 『Visitor』.....?”

Kazaya started running even as he muttered that to himself. After dashing through the forest, he suddenly reached an open space.

It was there that he saw it. A lizard-like monster covered in red scales. And in front of it, there was a girl who had collapsed to the ground in fright.

“A 『Salamander』, huh.....”

It was not a difficult opponent for someone like him who had accumulated a fair bit of experience. However, if his instincts were correct, the odds were stacked against that 『beginner』 over there.

Kazaya quickly ran, slid to a stop in front of the person who was being attacked, and stuck his hand out in front of him.

“Ye weapon clad in freezing storms, appear in my hand—Hailstorm King!”

The particles of light came together and created a beautiful blue rapier. He grabbed the hilt and pointed the sword towards the Salamander.

The blade of the sword was enveloped in what looked like a thin film. Despite the fact that the temperature in the surroundings was supposed to be fairly high, the grass that was near the sword was covered in frost. It was as if a limited area around him was suddenly plunged into mid-winter.

The Salamander opened its mouth. Kazaya caught a glimpse of the small flame that burned in the back of its mouth before it shot fire at him like a flamethrower.

However, Kazaya immediately swung his sword upwards, and the thin film that coated the blade flew forwards and wiped out the flames.

No, it was not just that. The film proceeded to cover the body of the Salamander, and in the next instant...

The Salamander’s body was completely covered in frost and frozen solid.

“Vanish, ye ominous fiery dragon!”

Kazaya kicked the Salamander, causing its body to shatter like glass.

He pulled out the box and opened the hatch, and just like the Orc Knight from before, the pieces of the Salamander’s body were converted into a sphere of light and absorbed into the box.

“Are you okay? You’re not injured, are you?”

Kazaya turned around while putting the box away.

At that moment, as soon as he saw the girl properly for the first time, he stiffened.

“.....Yes, I’m fine. Thank you for saving me.”

That girl had glossy black hair that reached her waist, white, unblemished skin, almond shaped eyes, and a face that was so perfect that it would make anyone gulp. She was like the 『Personification of a Japanese beauty』, a phrase that was close to disappearing from the language in recent times.

However, the girl's lovely features were not the reason for his surprise.



The girl was wearing a uniform that he recognized.

At first he thought that he must have been mistaken. However, there could be no doubt. This girl... This girl was—

“.....Mikoto-senpai?”

Hearing Kazaya say that, the girl—Mikoto Chihiro—tilted her head slightly to one side.

“Yes, that is my name. Have we met before?”

Mikoto Chihiro was also a student of Bunan Public High School just like Kazaya, and she was a year older than him.

She had at least three nicknames that Kazaya was aware of.

『Empress of Absolute Zero』, 『Celestial Maiden』, and 『Goddess of the Hallowed Ground』.

They were all names that had been given to her because of her beauty, the atmosphere around her, and the way she conducted herself.

Based on what Kazaya had heard from other students, she was the kind of person who would warrant a second look from others from the very first day that she joined the school, and she even had an unofficial fan club before a month had passed.

That was only natural. Not only was she exceptionally beautiful, she had also cleared the entrance examinations with a record-breaking high score. Moreover, she had such a high level of physical ability that all the club leaders of the various sports-oriented clubs came to scout her specifically.

However, despite her popularity, Chihiro never smiled, living up to her nickname of 『Absolute Zero』. In addition, due to the fact that she was constantly surrounded by an intense aura that made it hard for people to gather around her, just like a 『Celestial』 being, the few meters of space around her was a 『Hallowed』 area that was hard to sully.

Due to that, no one tried to approach Chihiro, and they were all content to just gaze upon her beauty and elegance from afar.

According to rumors, she came from a family that was part of a business conglomerate that had existed since a long time ago, and her father was an

important person who was well known in political and business circles. The atmosphere around Chihiro also lent credence to those rumors.

Nobody knew why someone like Chihiro attended such a completely ordinary school, and it was treated as one of the biggest mysteries among the students of Bunan High School.

On the other hand, no matter how you looked at him, Kazaya was completely unremarkable, the kind of person who might be used as an example for the phrase 『lacking personality』in a dictionary.

It goes without saying that he obviously had nothing in common with Chihiro, and in fact, the two of them had never even spoken to each other before.

He would just make an idiotic expression every time he saw her while thinking that there were such girls in his world after all.

However, it was impossible to tell how fate would work to bring people together.

“.....To think that Senpai would come over to this side as well.”

Kazaya unconsciously muttered that to himself as he descended from the boat to the harbor.

“What do you mean by ‘this side’? By the way, where are we?”

Chihiro asked him that while looking around at the surroundings. She had stopped speaking in an overly polite manner, probably because Kazaya had given her a simple self-introduction earlier that had established his identity as one of her juniors from school. Despite that, there was no change in the fact that her voice was still robotic and lacked warmth.

In any case, he had not explained a single thing to her yet, asking her to wait until things had settled down, so there were probably a lot of things that she did not understand.

“I’ll explain it to you now. Do you have any questions?”

“Questions, huh? You said your name was Tsugami-kun, right? In that case, Tsugami-kun—”

Chihiro had been looking downwards until now, but she suddenly raised her

head and asked with a serious expression.

“What is this?”

“Senpai, that question is too vague.”

Even if she suddenly asked that, he could only reply by asking “What are you talking about” in return.

“.....I guess you have a point. Give me a minute.”

Chihiro put her hand on her forehead and started to think deeply about something.

(Maybe... she's just really confused?)

It looked like the composure that she was famous for was a little lacking. That might be only natural considering her situation, but Kazaya still felt that it was extremely unusual behaviour for Chihiro.

“So there are times when even you feel perplexed, Senpai? You usually have this composed and unshakeable aura.”

“.....Tsugami-kun. I've been thrown into an unknown place all of a sudden and I was attacked by a creature I've never seen before. Don't you think that it would be more uncanny for a mere high school student to be composed in such a situation?”

Kazaya felt a chill run down his spine when he saw Chihiro say that in a low voice with her eyebrows slightly raised.

“Eh, ah, t-that's true. I'm sorry..... Are you angry?”

“Not really.”

It certainly didn't look like that was the case, but he abandoned the idea of continuing with this line of questioning.

“So, where exactly are we?”

“...We are in another world called Grimveria.”

“Another world, Grimveria?What do you mean we are in another world?”

“Just what it sounds like. It is a world where things such as common sense,

civilization, the laws of physics, ecology, and many other things are different from the world that we are from.”

“.....You can’t be serious. This is really a different world? There’s no way I can believe that.”

“In that case, let me ask you this, Senpai. We saw a lot of people on our way here, but many of them were obviously not Japanese, right?”

“What of it? It just means we are in a different country, right? Of the two, that seems like the more believable explanation.”

“If this really is just a different country, then why were all of them speaking in Japanese?”

Chihiro suddenly froze, and her mouth opened slightly. She must have realised the reason behind the sense of discomfort that she had been feeling since she came here.

“.....That is certainly true. But why?”

“Before I explain that, let me ask you a question. Senpai, didn’t you meet someone before you woke up in this world?”

“Meet someone? No, I don’t think so....hang on.”

Chihiro once again put her hand on her head and groaned to herself for a while.

“.....Now that you mention it, I did meet someone. A person who looked like she was six or seven years old, in a completely dark place.”

“I met that person as well. Or rather, every person who comes to this other world, Grimveria, will definitely meet her.”

“Just who is she?”

“She’s a goddess.”

Chihiro glared at him when he gave her that answer. As befitting someone with the nickname of Absolute Zero, it was a gaze that threatened to freeze him to the bone.

“Tsugami-kun. You are free to believe whatever you want, but I think it would

be better if you don't speak of such things without hesitation to other people. It might make some people want to avoid associating with you."

"T-Thanks for the warning, but I'm not trying to recruit you into a cult or anything. That person was a god of Grimveria."

".....So you refuse to back down. Very well. For argument's sake, let us assume that she really was a goddess. In that case, why did that adorable little goddess of Grimveria appear before me and you?"

"That's because she is the one who summoned us to this world.... Senpai, didn't she talk to you about all sorts of things? About Grimveria, the reason why we were summoned here, and the 『powers』 we were given to us for that purpose?"

"About that.... huh? She did say a lot of things to me. In short, she wanted my help in saving this world... I have a feeling it was something like that."

"Yes, that's right. We are warriors who have been selected by the goddess to save this world called Grimveria. The people of this world call us 『Visitors』."

"Something so ridiculous... but I feel like I am gradually remembering these things when you speak of them. Is all of this true? This is really a different world....?"

It looked like she was gradually coming to believe him. Chihiro's voice had been initially filled with suspicion, but that was beginning to fade away.

"In any case, do you understand your present situation?"

If she did not accept the things he had told her so far as fact, then they would just end up going around in circles forever.

Chihiro stayed silent for a while, and eventually nodded.

"I understand. I will accept your explanation for now. Still... no matter what the reason might be, I was suddenly brought over to a different world without even being given a chance to prepare myself, you know? Tsugami-kun, how are you able to stay so calm? Don't you want to go back to the world we came from?"

"I mean, we can go back whenever we want; it's almost too easy. In fact, I

came over here today after school ended, after all.”

Chihiro furrowed her beautiful eyebrows. She had probably not expected that response. He had felt the same way back when he first came here.

“Senpai, do you have any pockets on your clothes? You should try checking them.”

Chihiro did as she was told and put her hand into the pocket of her school uniform. She searched around inside that pocket for a while, and her expression changed as if she had found something unexpected.

Chihiro pulled her hand out of her pocket and tilted her head in confusion at the small green stone that rested on the palm of her hand.

“That’s a 『Teleportation Stone』. Everyone who is summoned to this world by the goddess is given four things, and that is one of them.”

“A Teleportation Stone... Ah, yes, I remember the goddess telling me about it. It is something that connects this world to the world that we come from, is that right?”

“Yes. Well, you can think of it as something similar to a teleportation spell from an RPG.”

“I have no idea what that means.”

“Senpai, do you play any video games? Or perhaps read manga or light novels?”

Chihiro shook her head. As a young person from modern Japan who did not know about manga, light novels, or games, she was in some ways a precious variety of human being.

“Okay, then. In that case, it might be easier to understand if you actually experience it. Hold it in your hand and focus your thoughts. Think about the place that you want to go to. Umm, since it’s your first time, let’s try it out with the rooftop of our school.”

Chihiro held the Teleportation Stone in her hand, and Kazaya pulled out a similar stone from inside his clothes.

“Like this?”

Chihiro closed her eyes and furrowed her eyebrows, and in the next instant...

Her surroundings were filled with darkness for a moment, but as soon as it cleared up, she saw that her environment had changed completely.

She could see a faraway range of mountains on the other side of the tall fence that surrounded the area, and the crimson light from the sun that was setting behind those mountains was illuminating the residential district. She could hear the voices of students going about their club activities from the grounds below her, and a chime rang out to signify that it was five o'clock in the afternoon.

".....This certainly is the school rooftop."

Chihiro kicked the ground beneath her feet several times, as if desperately trying to understand all the different things she had gone through.

"I can't believe something like this is actually happening in real life... Hey, weren't you wearing armor just a moment ago?"

Chihiro appeared dazed for a little while, and looked at Kazaya.

"Ah, that. When you return to this world, you go back to what you looked like before transferring to the other world. Convenient, isn't it?"

"I see. Well, I would expect no less from a goddess.... In any case, I didn't think that I would be able to come back so soon."

"It looks like the goddess doesn't want to force us to do anything. So we can take things easy."

"True, it certainly does seem that way. But there is something that bothers me if that is the case. Tsugami-kun, why do you still keep going back there when you are able to come back here of your own free will?"

"Oh, that's simple. That's because Grimveria is a fun place."

".....A fun place?"

"Yes. You see, I love playing games. That place lets me experience the feeling of playing a game in real life. After all, I can use weapons, defeat demonic beasts, and go exploring on islands. It is far better than any open world FPS or virtual reality system."

“But it can also be dangerous, right? What if you are attacked by those so-called demonic beasts?”

“It looks like the goddess also took that into account, so you don’t need to worry about it. I’ll skip the details for now, but while things can get a little thrilling, your life is never in any actual danger.”

Kazaya smiled and thumped his chest.

“The Visitors have fun while going on adventures, and as a result, the people of Grimveria are saved. There’s really no bad side to this.”

“That... might be true, but....”

“Senpai, my aim is to clear the whole of Grimveria without leaving anything undone. There are still many things in that world that I have never seen before. Seeing all of them before anybody else is my dream.”

That is why he excitedly traveled to the other world after school. Because it was a more fascinating experience than anything else.

“That place is overflowing with so many exciting and wonderful things, it’s like living in a dream.”

Chihiro looked downwards, and Kazaya had no way of telling what she was thinking about.

“Still, I think it’s fine for you to not force yourself, Senpai. Like I said before, your safety is not completely guaranteed. Unlike me, if you have no reason to go then you would be better off not going over there.”

“But I was chosen by the goddess as well, wasn’t I? Is it okay to do whatever I want despite that?”

“I don’t think there are any penalties for not going. There are other Visitors in Grimveria apart from you and me and I’ve met a few of them, so I know a person who had to retire due to personal reasons. He came over again once after a while out of boredom, and when I spoke to him, he said that nothing really happened to him when he stopped coming over.”

“It sounds like that goddess is really generous.”

“Well, the other side is basically summoning us over by force, after all. That is

the minimum level of consideration. If you don't want to go, then you don't have to."

".....You're right."

After hearing what Kazaya said, Chihiro closed her eyes and whispered that in a low voice.

"Yes. However, if you say the word, I will gladly serve as your guide."

Kazaya said that half in jest, and bowed his head.

"Well then, I should be on my way. I'm glad I got to talk to you Senpai, even though it was under such strange circumstances."

"The same goes for me as well. Thanks for everything."

"It was nothing."

Kazaya responded to her thanks, waved to her, and turned around to leave.

".....Exciting... and wonderful things...."

Just as he was about to open the rooftop door, Kazaya thought he heard Chihiro whisper something.

Despite saying that he wanted to clear the whole of Grimveria as a warrior, he was still just an ordinary high school student when he returned home.

The next day, a groggy Kazaya went to school right after waking up, and somehow managed to get through his lessons that threatened to lull him to sleep. He purchased a bento to fill his empty stomach during lunchtime.

"It just feels like every single day is so boring."

Maesaki, who sat in the seat in front of his, grumbled. Kazaya had known him since middle school.

"I thought high school would be a place with beautiful girls, or that a bizarrely powerful student council would be in control of the school, or that there would be a corps of people who secretly fought against monsters on the school grounds late at night, you know?"

"You've been reading too many manga and light novels."

As Kazaya said that with a wry smile, another student looked in his direction from the seat next to him.

Her name was Ayukawa, and she had also been one of Kazaya's friends from around the same time as Maesaki.

"I know what you mean. Like, imagine if I actually turned out to be a princess from some country, and a young man transferred into our school to be my bodyguard. Or maybe five extremely popular boys would fight fiercely with each other for my attentions. As a girl in high school, I want to hope for things like that as well!"

"You seriously daydream about stuff like that all the time?"

"Yeah, so?"

Ayukawa said that with a straight face. Kazaya thought that both she and Maesaki were suffering from an illness, in more ways than one.

"There's just no excitement at all. Do you know how I spend my time everyday? My days are just filled with social networking games. Sure, they're fun, but what I'm looking for is something that would really let me enjoy my youth."

Maesaki lamented while looking up at the ceiling.

"Yeah, I agree with you completely. I spend every single day just interacting with lovers who are on the other side of a monitor. I mean, that's not particularly bad, it's just that I feel empty inside from time to time!"

"I know, right?"

Ayukawa and Maesaki shook hands across Kazaya's desk.

"Then why don't you just quit playing social networking games?"

""I'd sooner quit being human.""

The two of them simultaneously answered Kazaya's question. Kazaya shuddered and wondered at what point the two of them had fallen to such a state.

"I wish something interesting would happen to me. Like getting summoned to

another world all of a sudden, or something.”

“Hahahaha. There’s no way that will happen.”

Kazaya was startled by what Maesaki said, but he was careful to not let his feelings show as he laughed and shook his head.

“Well, yeah. But if it’s not that, it could even be something like that Mikoto-senpai coming to talk to me all of a sudden.”

“The chances of that happening are even lower than getting summoned to another world.”

“Seriously!?”

Maesaki collapsed onto his desk at Ayukawa’s comment.

Kazaya wondered how the two of them would react if he told them that not only had he been summoned to another world, he had actually held a proper conversation with Chihiro instead of just exchanging a few words with her. Of course, he had no intention of actually telling them about that.

“You don’t know that for sure, Mikoto-senpai might open the classroom door at this very moment and come up to my desk—”

It happened in that instant when Maesaki was continuing to talk about his delusions.

The classroom door was opened vigorously, and the noise from the students instantly stopped.

Kazaya looked in that direction wondering what had happened... only to see Mikoto Chihiro standing there.

She looked around the classroom with her sharp gaze, and fixed her eyes on a particular location. It was in the direction where Kazaya and the others were sitting. After that, she started walking towards them without a hint of hesitation.

“O-Oi! Is this for real? I thought it was just a dream, but it’s actually real!? Mikoto-senpai! I had no idea that you felt that way about me—!”

Maesaki spread his arms with a blissful expression. However, Chihiro just

looked at him,

“Sorry, but I have no business with you.”

And cut him down with a single sentence. In addition, Maesaki held his chest as if he had been pierced through by her frosty glare.

“I-I know, right!? There’s no way you would have any business with a piece of trash like me! Aah, but those eyes of yours that look at me like I’m a troublesome stone that is getting in your way on the road, I feel like I’m getting addicted to it.....!”

Kazaya started to wonder if this guy had that sort of fetish, but then he noticed that many of the other students around them were reacting in the same way. It looked like Chihiro’s gaze had the ability to awaken a certain something in people.

“Tsugami-kun. Would you mind accompanying me for a while after school if you don’t have any other plans? I’ll wait for you near the school gate.”

“Eh!? Ah, umm, sure, I don’t mind.”

“See you then.”

Hearing Kazaya’s answer, Chihiro turned and walked out boldly just like she had done while walking into the classroom.

The whole classroom was filled with silence, this was not particularly unusual.

However, in the next instant, people all over the classroom suddenly started whispering to each other.

“Oi, Mikoto-senpai just asked Tsugami to accompany her. It’s Mikoto-senpai, that person who is like inviolate hallowed ground, you know!?”

“Impossible... the Celestial Maiden cannot possibly have any interest in commoners. What’s going on?”

Ayukawa leaned towards him with an excited expression.

“Hey. Hey, hey. Hey, hey, hey. Kazaya, what sort of relationship do you have with Mikoto-senpai? Did you become her servant or something!?”

“Why would I become Senpai’s servant.....”

“In that case, don’t tell me you are lovers!? No way.....”

Ayukawa and the others spoke in shrill voices.

“No, no, it’s nothing like that!”

He panicked and denied it, but it looked like his classmates were already convinced that they were lovers. They all looked at him with eyes alight with curiosity. He couldn’t blame them. The Empress of Absolute Zero had never spoken to anyone of her own volition until today, after all.

“Kuh..... Guh..... Tsugamiiiiiiii!!”

Maesaki suddenly stood up and grabbed the collar of Kazaya’s school uniform.

“You bastard! Since when? When did it start!? Dammit! But still! Even so!!”

He released Kazaya on his own, and gave him a salute instead.

“Jealousy is unsightly! In such a scenario, I should just swallow my tears of blood and cheer my friend on while he enjoys the bounty of spring.....!”

“Aah! Maesaki! Well done, you’re such a great guy!”

Seeing Ayukawa praise Maesaki and clap loudly, the rest of the class followed her lead. Even Kazaya was somewhat touched.

“Maesaki... You’re a good guy. But seriously, it’s not like that. We just have a bit of a connection, that’s all.”

“What the heck is that supposed to mean? Do they sell that ‘connection’ somewhere!? How much should I pay to have a connection with her as well!?”

“Calm down, Maesaki. You’re not making any sense.”

Ayukawa intervened to calm Maesaki down. As for Kazaya, he thought that he had become mixed up in something troublesome, and mentally sighed.

After that, he continued to receive various questions about his relationship with Mikoto-senpai from his suspicious classmates, and somehow deflected all of them until school finally ended for the day.

Staying there would just expose him to further barrages of questions, so he packed up his belongings and left the classroom.

“Where are you going, Tsugamiiiiii! Let me guess, you’re going on a date with Senpai, aren’t youuuuuu!”

Kazaya ran as Maesaki shouted out his pent-up resentment from behind, and he was out of breath by the time he arrived at the front gate.

Chihiro was already waiting there, and she called out to him as soon as she spotted him.

“What’s wrong? You look really tired.”

“.....I went through hell because you decided to speak to me in a place like that, Senpai.”

“Did I do something bad? I assumed that the classroom would be the most convenient place to contact you.”

“No, that is... Senpai, you should be more aware of your own position... Never mind.”

Kazaya decided to stop there because it would take a long time to explain. Chihiro probably didn’t even know how the other students in the school saw her.

In any case, there were too many people around their current location, so Kazaya walked to a nearby park along with Chihiro.

After confirming that there weren’t any people nearby, they both sat on the single bench that was available.

“.....Tell me, Tsugami-kun. Do you intend to go to Grimveria today?”

Chihiro opened the conversation with that question. Kazaya answered her, although he was a little taken aback.

“Yes, it has become part of my daily routine.... Were you planning on stopping me from going?”

Kazaya thought that she had come to him to warn him against doing any more dangerous things. Of course, just telling her that the other world was generally safe would not be enough to make her accept it. There was a chance that she might have been worried about him.

Chihiro just stared at him without saying anything. However, just that stare was strangely overwhelming. Perhaps that came from the indescribable sense of dignity that hung about her.

(Ugh... She's pretty even without trying.... But I won't lose!)

Kazaya fired himself up and collected his meagre amount of bravery.

“N-No, Senpai! I’m glad for your consideration, but Grimveria really isn’t—”

“I want you to take me along.”

“.....Excuse me?”

He reflexively asked her to repeat herself. It was just that unexpected a request.

“I want to go to Grimveria as well. However, I am still unfamiliar with this sort of thing. So I thought of requesting your guidance. You said earlier that you would gladly serve as my guide, after all.”

Chihiro explained it in more detail, maybe because she thought he was having trouble understanding what she meant. However, Kazaya wasn’t talking about that.

“P-Please wait. Senpai, do you really want to go? Why?”

“Because I want to. That world is a fun place, right? You said it yourself.”

“I mean, sure, it’s a fun place for me, but...”

Kazaya continued to speak, trying to find out what she was thinking.

“Senpai, you have no interest in games or manga, right? In that case, I think you won’t feel the same way about that world as I do.”

“When did I say that I have no interest in games and manga? I just said that I don’t know about them.”

“I-I see. So you are actually interested!?”

Chihiro nodded. This was unexpected. This was way too unexpected. Kazaya gazed intently at Chihiro’s face without intending to.

“.....What is it?”

Chihiro's expression turned slightly suspicious upon seeing Kazaya's reaction.

"Ah, it's nothing. I'm sorry. I just didn't expect you to be interested in things like that, Senpai."

"What do you say? I won't force you or anything. If you think it will be too much of a burden, I can try going alone."

Kazaya stood up and pulled his Teleportation Stone out of his school uniform pocket.

"No, I don't mind at all. If you want to see what that world is like, Senpai, then I would be glad to have you along."

".....Really? I'm grateful. I'll be counting on you."

Chihiro also stood up and took his hand. Kazaya felt his heartbeat speed up when he felt her cool and soft skin.

"I-It's nothing... Well then, let's go over there right away."

This was something completely beyond his expectations. To think that he would be traveling together with that Mikoto Chihiro... Honestly, this was even more surprising than the time when he had first been summoned to the other world.

Chihiro and Kazaya held their Teleportation Stones and closed their eyes.

And so, the two of them flew over to the other world, Grimveria. They arrived at a place that was excessively large and spacious.

".....Tsugami-kun, this place really is different from our world, right? Meaning there are no other students from our school here except for you?"

Chihiro whispered that while looking around at her surroundings.

"Eh? A-Ah, I think that is the case."

Kazaya furrowed his eyebrows because he couldn't understand what she meant by that question.

".....Yes....."

Chihiro let out a small voice. At the same time, she crouched down and started trembling all of a sudden.

“Senpai? What’s wrong? Do you feel sick?”

Kazaya was confused because of the sudden change that came over her, but in the next instant...

“Yessssssssssss!! I’m freeeeeeeeeeee!!”

Chihiro yelled loudly all of a sudden, sprang up, spread her hands out, and looked up at the sky. In addition, she turned around and grabbed both of Kazaya’s arms, moving closer to him with a big smile on her face.

“Hey! So what are we doing today!? What kind of things are we going to do!? Something... something adventurous, right!? Or maybe we should have a meal first? Sweets from the other world!? A full course of other world food!? What should we do, Tsugami-kun!? Freedom! We are free to do whatever we want, right!?”

“S-Senpai!? Wait, is this really you!?”

The cool beauty image she possessed until just earlier disappeared like a building built on loose sand, and only an innocent highschool girl was left behind.

“Yes, it’s me!! I’m your Senpai! My name is Mikoto Chihiro, it’s nice to meet you!”

“Yeah, I already know that! What’s with the sudden enthusiasm!? Isn’t it a little too much for you!?”

“Nope! I’m not straining myself at all! If anything, this is how I really am!”

“Wait, really!?”

It was far too different from her usual behaviour. Just what had happened to make her this way?

“You know, ever since I was a little girl, my father told me to always behave like an elegant and cool-headed lady as befitting a woman from my family. So when I’m at home and school, I pretend to be the perfect honors student who doesn’t flinch at anything. But there’s no one watching me here, right? So I don’t need to care about that!”

“I-I see. So that’s what happened. It looks like you’ve had a rough time,

Senpai...”

“That’s right, it was really a pain! I really wanted to own manga, light novels, and games, but my father didn’t allow it, saying that things like those reek of vulgarity and are not necessary for a person from the Mikoto Family! That’s why, I’m going to do as I please, at least while I’m in another world. Understand!?”

“S-Sure, I don’t really mind... Umm, didn’t you consider that I might tell everyone your secret?”

“.....Haah!?”



Chihiro crouched down and held her head.

“I was so happy that I forgot to consider that possibility...”

(Are you an idiot?)

Kazaya swallowed the words that he almost said aloud.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to tell anyone. It would probably just get you into trouble, after all.”

“Really? You mean that, right!? It’s a promise, okay? If you break it, you have to drink molten lead, okay?”

“Hell no, that’s scary! It feels more realistic than swallowing a thousand needles, and you might actually make me do that!”

“I was kidding about that. But I would really appreciate it if you kept it a secret.”

“I understand. I definitely won’t tell anyone.”

“Alright then, let’s pinky swear.”

Saying that, Chihiro held up her little finger. While Kazaya hesitated to touch the skin of a member of the opposite sex who was older than him, Chihiro apparently did not care about that at all and grabbed his hand and entwined her finger around his. His heartbeat sped up at the feeling of that cool skin.

“.....Alright! Now, I suppose it is time for me to enjoy this world called Grimveria to its fullest!”

Chihiro faced forward and started walking away boldly.

(I-I had no idea that Senpai could smile like that.....)

Since she was usually hard to approach, the gap between her two personalities was so large that it felt like he was dreaming.

(Still, her current personality isn’t bad either. Actually, it’s pretty nice.)

Despite her stunning beauty, she was acting excited like a child. It was strangely adorable.

“Hey, who is that?”

Chihiro came to a stop and pointed in a certain direction. There were no buildings in the place they were currently standing in, but there was a large statue of a beautiful woman placed in the centre.

“That’s the goddess.”

Chihiro became silent after hearing Kazaya’s answer. However, the look in her eyes as she stared at him spoke more eloquently than any response.

“Yeah, I know. You’re thinking that it doesn’t look anything like her, right? I thought the same thing. However, the people of this world have never seen the goddess, after all.”

“Even so, this is just too different! Haven’t they heard about what she looks like from other people like ourselves?”

“Even if you tell them, they will just laugh and refuse to believe you. It looks like they have considered the appearance of the goddess—whose name is also Grimveria and served as the inspiration for the name of this world—to be like this since ancient times.”

“Eeeeeeeeh. I can’t accept that at all. Tsugami-kun, what do you think of going around with me and spreading the truth about the goddess’s true appearance?”

“Please don’t. What if we get cursed by the goddess!?”

Chihiro reluctantly backed off when Kazaya stopped her. Perhaps she understood that there was no point in arguing about Lady Grimveria any further.

“By the way, this place looks different from the spot where we used the Teleportation Stones last time.”

“Ah. We can go back to our world from any location, but when we come to this world using a Teleportation Stone, we will always appear in this place without fail. I assume it was made this way because there were many things to consider, such as the risk of appearing in the middle of a dangerous situation. It is something like a ‘save point’.”

“Save... what?”

“A save point is a fixed location in a game from where you can start over if you want to do so. By the way, we are currently in a city called Reancos, which is a capital city in the Central Continent. It is the biggest city on the continent.”

“I see. Since you said ‘capital’, I assume there is a country here?”

“Yes, there are quite a few. Reancos is in the Heinart Kingdom. Well, Visitors like us don’t really need to worry about the different countries, though. For now, please follow me.”

Kazaya started walking, and chose the middle path from among three paths that extended radially from the center of the open space.

There were many people entering and leaving the city. They were dressed in a wide variety of clothes, from travel clothing to armor. Some people were carrying heavy luggage, and a few people were using horse-drawn wagons to move around.

There were many street stalls that were constructed in a simple fashion, and the owners were loudly announcing their wares which consisted of seafood that had been skewered and roasted or made into a soup.

“Oh? I thought the same thing yesterday as well, but it looks like the time period here is not comparable to our modern age after all. Judging from the clothing and their choice of transportation, it looks more like Europe in the Middle Ages. But there are a few cultural aspects that don’t seem to match up to that....”

Chihiro spoke out in curiosity as she walked behind Kazaya.

“That’s right. It’s quite different from the history of our world.”

Kazaya answered her as they continued to walk, when a man who was passing by called out to him.

“Oh, if it isn’t Kazaya. How’s the harvest going these days?”

“Not bad, I suppose. I’m going today as well, so I’ll bring something back for you.”

“Oh, I’ll look forward to that. You always bring back something good when you go exploring on an island. Thanks for all your help.”

The man said that, waved his hand, and left.

“Is that person a friend of yours? Tsugami-kun, are you perhaps quite popular?”

“No, not really. It’s just that I’ve done a lot of stuff since I came here.”

Kazaya gave a vague answer and continued to walk while skilfully avoiding people in the crowd that had become even larger.

“Ahh, this is so much fun! I’ve never been to one, but I wonder if this is what it feels like to visit an amusement park. I feel like I’ll end up smiling like a fool if I don’t keep myself in check.”

“There’s no need to hold back, is there? I’d like to see you making that kind of expression as well, Senpai.”

“Tsugami-kun, that’s sexual harassment!”

“Eeh!?”

“Just kidding.”

“Please don’t joke about stuff like that, it’s bad for my heart.”

“Sorry, sorry. I’ll make it up to you by requesting a lighter sentence at your trial in court.”

“So you’re still going to sue me for sexual harassment after all!?”

Chihiro gave an evil cackle upon hearing Kazaya’s objection. She was really different from her usual self. It could even be said that this was a different personality altogether. It probably just meant that she had been putting on such a strong mask in school all this time.

(.....In that case, it would be good to let her be completely free at least in this world.)

Watching Chihiro enjoy herself was soothing even for him. In that case, he would accompany her no matter where she wanted to go. Kazaya firmly decided that in his heart.

“Still, this is quite strange. Putting aside the spoken language for now, I’m sure I have never seen this form of writing before. And yet I can read it as though I learned it a long time ago.”

“It looks like that is because of the goddess’s power as well. She made it that way so that we would find it easier to adjust to this place.”

Kazaya walked along a street that was lined with buildings on both sides, and stopped in front of one that had a red roof.

The words 『Spring Bell Inn』 were written on the signboard.

“When Visitors decide to take action in some location in Grimveria, they decide on a store that serves as a base of operations. Most of them are inns or taverns with lodging facilities. The Spring Bell Inn has great food and the rooms are clean, so it’s quite popular. I like this place a lot as well, and I always make sure to drop by when I’m in the neighborhood.”

“So there are times when you stay here overnight?”

“It depends on the situation. Some Visitors have stayed here for as long as a week.”

After they pushed through the double doors and walked inside, Chihiro found herself in a spacious room with a number of tables and chairs lined up. There were already a number of red-faced patrons who were drinking from ceramic vessels. They probably contained beer or wine.

There was a bar along the far side of the room where a single man stood polishing a glass. The shelves behind him were tightly packed with bottles of alcoholic beverages.

“Well, if it isn’t Kazaya.”

Seeing the man at the bar smiling and stopping his work, the nearby customers looked in their direction and started whispering amongst themselves.

However, when Chihiro glanced at them, they got flustered and returned to drinking.

“Are all the people in this shop Visitors?”

“Not all of them are Visitors, but most of them are. Hello, Bado-san.”

When Kazaya approached the bar, the man called Bado looked at Chihiro and blinked.

“Oh? I don’t think I’ve seen this young lady before.”

“Yes. Her name is Mikoto Chihiro, and she will be participating in clearing the islands starting today. She might be using your facilities here in case something happens.”

“I am glad to make your acquaintance.”

“Nice to meet you.”

After Chihiro gave a polite bow, Bado replied with a cheerful smile.

“Hmm? Bado-san, where’s Nina?”

“I asked her to go buy a few things. I feel like she’ll be angry with me for sending her away on an errand if she learns that you came by.”

“Sorry, I’ll come by again when she’s around. Two fruit smoothies, please.”

After placing his order, Kazaya sat down across from Chihiro at an open table.

“Who’s Nina?”

“She works at this store. She’s Bado-san’s only daughter.”

“Oh? Is she your girlfriend, Tsugami-kun?”

“No, no, she’s just a friend.”

“Oh, so you used to be friends before you started going out?”

“Like I said, we’re just friends!”

“So you’re going to go out with her eventually?”

“We’re friends! Why are you trying to move the conversation in that direction!?”

Chihiro brushed her long hair back with her fingers and smiled suggestively.

“That’s because... I find it extremely amusing, Tsugami-kun!”

“...Right then. If you want to go adventuring in Grimveria, Senpai, you need to know more about this world.”

“Ah, you ignored me! That’s so mean!”

“If you know of any way to handle that situation apart from ignoring it, please tell me! Anyway, what would you like to know about first? There are so many

things to talk about that even I'm not sure where to begin."

Chihiro looked down and started to think. During that time, Bado brought over their drinks and Kazaya paid him.

"What is this?"

Chihiro picked up the ceramic cup and asked that while looking at the contents.

"It's a fruit smoothie. It's made by mixing the juices from various fruits and adding milk and honey. You can think of it as a mixed fruit juice."

Chihiro took a sip and opened her eyes wide.

"Delicious! Drinking something like this that is made locally really makes me feel that I am in a foreign land!"

"Rather than a foreign land, the world itself is different, though."

"There's no need to nitpick.... By the way, we can use our Teleportation Stones to go back home from any place in this world, right? So why did we use a boat to get back to where we first met?"

"Ah. I thought it would be better for you to come into contact with some of the things and the people here so that you would be more willing to accept that this is a different world."

"Ah, so that was the reason."

Chihiro nodded as if she was convinced.

"Fumu. Alright, here's a question. For starters, can you tell me what kind of world this is?"

Kazaya pulled out a small, folded parchment from his pocket and spread it out on the table.

"Roger that. This is a world map of Grimveria."

The map had a color that was distinctive of aged parchment, and it showed a large land mass surrounded by a many small islands.

Kazaya pointed to a spot on the map.

“Grimveria consists of this land mass here, called the 『Central Continent』, and a few dozen islands that surround it. The islands contain food and other necessary resources, but at the same time they are also home to dreadful monsters.”

“You mean creatures like the one I ran into, correct? Umm... did you call it a 『Demonic Beast』?”

“That’s right. Visitors like us are tasked with traveling to these islands, exterminating the demonic beasts or securing resources and food supplies, and bringing them back to the Central Continent. The demonic beasts can also be processed into food and other necessary items, so we secure a supply of those as well.”

Chihiro tilted her neck.

“Why do we have to do those things? What about the people from this world?”

“Of course, there are some people from this world who make the journey as well. But such people are very rare. The people of Grimveria are peaceful and friendly, but putting it another way, they basically loathe violence. Most of the people here have never so much as held a weapon, and that is why we are needed.”

“I see... What about resources on this continent?”

“I heard that there were some resources here in the past, but it looks like they’ve all been used up.”

“Despite that, they don’t want to travel to the islands? Hmm. That’s a little—or rather, it’s very strange.”

“I thought the same thing. I assume there must be a reason why the goddess went to the effort of bringing people here from a different world.”

However, the goddess hadn’t told them anything about that. Perhaps she thought it was unnecessary, or maybe she just didn’t want to talk about it.

“Okay, I understand. So that’s why you were on that island at that time?”

“That’s right.Well, that’s pretty much all I wanted to talk about. There are

still a number of things you should know regarding the Visitors, but I think you'll understand those while traveling to and from the islands and making the necessary preparations to do so. There's something we need to take care of before that, though, so we should get going."

Kazaya put his hand on the table and stood up, and left the shop after saying goodbye to Bado.

After leaving the pub behind, they walked along the street for a while and finally arrived at their destination. The signboard had a picture of a green-colored Teleportation Stone drawn on it.

"This is the place where new Visitors are registered. Once your name is added to the register, you will be given an identification card that you will need to travel to the islands."

After opening the the door and going inside, they saw a tall and slender man sitting at a desk and reading a book.

"Notto-san, we are here to register a new Visitor. She's the one."

"Hmm? Ah, Kazaya. It's been a while. Oh my, she's certainly quite beautiful. Is she your lover?"

"That's right."

Chihiro affirmed his guess without any hesitation.

"Wha—Come on, you're supposed to deny that!!

"Come on, it's fine, isn't it? If you don't have feelings for that girl called Nina, it might as well be me."

"T-That's not what I'm talking about, and besides, are you really okay with someone like me, Senpai!?"

"Of course."

"....."

".....S-Sorry. I only wanted to tease you a bit, but I didn't expect you to take it so seriously."

"E-Eh!? I-I wasn't taking it seriously at all! Not one bit! Whatever gave you

that idea!? I was definitely not thinking about anything of the sort!! Hahaha!”

Kazaya broke out in a cold sweat while talking continuously.

“Well, you two certainly look like an interesting pair. We will gladly accept your registration. What’s your name, pretty lady?”

“I am called Mikoto Chihiro.”

Notto nodded, pulled a register out of a drawer, and wrote down the name 『Mikoto Chihiro』. He then took out a business card-sized piece of parchment from another drawer and wrote her name on that as well. After that, he used the candle that was burning on this desk to dribble some wax on to the parchment, and pressed a seal into the hot wax before it finished solidifying, leaving behind an impression of a Teleportation Stone in the wax.

“Okay, here you go. This is proof that you are a Visitor.”

“Thank you very much.”

Chihiro accepted the paper that he held out towards her, thanked him, and bowed.

“Do we only need this for getting onboard a ship?”

Once they had left the store, Chihiro asked that while looking at the rear of the identification card.

“No, there are other advantages to having one of those as well. You can get tools and armor you will need to go exploring on islands for cheaper, and you also get a discount on the cost of your meals and lodging.”

“That’s quite a bonus.”

“According to the people here, it is because they depend on us Visitors for their survival.”

Chihiro nodded as if she was convinced.

“You just said that people with an identification card could purchase armor more cheaply, but do people who are not Visitors have any use for armor?”

“Yes. Remember how I told you earlier that a small number of people from this world go to the islands as well? However, it is still dangerous work, so

people who are not Visitors are usually not welcome, and they are also forced to buy armor and other things for a high price as well. Selling items to people like them is basically the same as supporting the actions of a reckless person, after all.”

“Oh, I see. So they are trying to reduce the number of such people by keeping the prices high.”

“That’s right.”

Kazaya agreed with her analysis and stopped in front of a shop that had a picture of armor drawn on the signboard.

“Now then, it’s time to get you some armor, Senpai. Well, you won’t get hit even if you don’t wear armor, but this is just in case.”

“I won’t get hit even if I don’t wear armor? Why is that?”

“I’ll explain more about that later. —It’s been a while, Ruma-san.”

Kazaya opened the door, walked in, and greeted the female clerk who sat at a counter on the far side of the shop.

“Oh, Kazaya-san. You should have let me know that you would be coming over. I need some time to prepare myself as well, you know?”

“Why’s that?”

“I mean, if I knew you were coming over, Kazaya-san, I would have changed into a dress that shows more of my cleavage and bare legs.”

“W-What are you planning to do!?”

“Ufufu, playing dumb, I see.”

Ruma gave him a sweet smile. She was a person who would sometimes say things like this to make him feel uncomfortable.

“.....Umm, this is Mikoto Chihiro-san. She is a Visitor like me, and will start exploring from today. Since she’s a girl, can you prepare some lightweight armor for her?”

“Hmm? I understand. But before that, do you mind if I ask a question? Is this Chihiro-san your lover, Kazaya-san?”

“.....Eh? Umm, why do you ask?”

After hearing the same question as before once again, Kazaya looked up at her with a dazed expression.

“Isn’t it obvious? How I interact with her will depend on your answer, after all.”

“Eeeeeeeh. Why would you do that?”

“Nevermind. Just answer the question.”

“That’s rig–humpf.”

Kazaya covered Chihiro’s mouth with his hand as she was about to answer. He didn’t want to end up in the same sort of situation once again.

“N-No, we are not lovers. Not at all. She is my senior from school.”

“Hmpfmmpf.”

“Oh my, it looks like the pretty girl over there is trying to say something important.”

“That’s just your imagination.”

Kazaya saw the ends of Chihiro’s eyebrows sag a little. He could feel a sense of regret coming from her.

“Well, that’s fine. A ‘school’ is where people from your world go to study, right? If that is the case, then it’s okay. I look forward to your patronage in the future as well, Chihiro-chan.”

“.....Yes, thank you.”

Chihiro, who had finally been freed from Kazaya’s grip, turned her face away and answered. It was not apparent to Ruma, but Chihiro’s expression was very sullen.

“Alright then, please wait for a little while. I’ll find something for you.”

Ruma walked away from the counter while swaying her hips, and started selecting pieces of armor from around the store.

“Senpai, why do you insist on, umm, declaring that you are my lover so many

times?”

Kazaya called out to Chihiro in a low voice.

“We are in a different world, after all. What’s wrong living a little dangerously?”

“Please don’t get me mixed up in that.”

“.....You’re right. Having someone like me as your girlfriend would just be troublesome for you, Tsugami-kun.”

“Eh!? N-No, I didn’t mean it that way, and it certainly makes me happy when you say that, but...”

“There are some very calculating women who will say things like that to mislead men, so be careful.”

“.....Ah, okay.”

“Good.”

Hearing Kazaya’s reply, Chihiro smiled and patted his head. Kazaya could not help but think that he was being made to dance in the palm of her hand. However, having these kinds of interactions with a girl who had been a faraway existence to him until only recently felt both fresh and amusing.

“By the way, is that person called Ruma always like that?”

“No, according to what I’ve heard from people I know, she is perfectly ordinary with other customers. Well, she’s six years older than me, so I guess it’s sort of like an older sister teasing her little brother.”

“.....Well, I guess that is also a possibility.”

Chihiro let out a meaningful sigh. Just when Kazaya furrowed his eyebrows in confusion—

“Sorry to keep you waiting. I think this should be fine for a girl, don’t you?”

Ruma returned while pushing along a handcart filled with different pieces of armor and started arranging them on the counter.

“All of them are of the variety that just protect the chest, elbows, lower back, and a part of the legs, but I think that should be more than enough for a Visitor.

But the one I would recommend is *this one*.”

The armor Ruma lifted up to display after saying that had thin metal straps and it looked like it would barely cover the breasts. What’s more, the part on the bottom was made with a risque angle that would only cover the important bits.

“It’s a lot more sturdy than it looks, so don’t worry.”

“Wow, this is amazing! So this goes over my clothes?”

Chihiro asked that while examining the armor closely. Ruma continued to smile and answered that.

“What are you saying, Chihiro-chan? You obviously aren’t supposed to wear anything beneath this.”

“Wait, isn’t that a bikini armor? No way, no way, no way. Senpai won’t wear that!”

Kazaya retorted without thinking.

“Ehh.... I think it’s fine. It looks easy to move around in.”

“It’s not enough if it just easy to move around in!”

“It is easy to become a female pervert while wearing this as well.”

“What is the point of making it easy to become a female pervert!?”

“Tsugami-kun, I think I’ll take this one after all!”

“Senpai, stop looking so excited about it! This won’t do!”

Kazaya shook his head violently upon seeing Chihiro eagerly pick up the armor with a high degree of exposure.

“Ehh... Why not? I definitely won’t be able to wear something like this in Japan.”

“Not just Japan, I don’t think you will be able to wear it in other countries either. Senpai, don’t you feel embarrassed about wearing something like that?”

“Sure, I’m embarrassed, but I feel like I can slowly get addicted to that embarrassment!”

“Please give up on trying to go down that particular road!”

He rejected that particular armor and pushed it away.

“But it was my recommendation....”

Ruma pouted, but she put away the bikini armor.

“Muuuuuu. Tsugami-kun you cheapskate.”

“It’s not about being a cheapskate.... And besides, I don’t like the idea of you displaying your bare skin to the general public, Senpai.”

“Ehh... So you’re saying that it’s okay if I wear that just in front of you, is that it?”

Chihiro suddenly blushed, causing Kazaya to become flustered.

“N-No, I didn’t mean it that way!! No, I mean, there may or may not be a small part of me that feels something similar to that.... Okay, there is.”

“.....So there is a small part of you that wants that.”

“Well of course! Senpai wearing something like that!? Of course I would want to see it!”

Kazaya unintentionally said that out aloud, and Chihiro blinked several times.

“I-I see. Umm.... thank you.”

Chihiro gave a small cough to clear her throat and bowed her head. Her face was red once again. Even Kazaya started to feel embarrassed.

“Oh? So the two of you are going out after all?”

“N-No, we’re not!”

Ruma was looking at them with an interested look on her face, and Kazaya denied it.

“But does armor like that really protect the body?”

“.....No, it does not. I think that is just something Ruma-san keeps around because of her interests.”

“What is the point of making armor that doesn’t protect the body?”

“It doesn’t necessarily have to be used in battle. There’s, you know, stuff like night-time play.”

“Night-time play?”

“Never mind. Ruma-san, we will take those.”

Kazaya pointed out a breastplate and elbow guards that even Chihiro would be able to wear without putting strain on her body, and Ruma started to calculate the cost.

“Hey, what is ‘night-time play’? Come on, tell me.”

Kazaya thought that he had successfully put that topic to rest, but Chihiro continued to ask that while pulling on his sleeve.

“You don’t need to worry about it. It is something that is completely unrelated to you.”

“We don’t know that for sure, right? You never know, there might be a time when I have to play that with you.”

“T-That’s not going to happen!”

Kazaya answered in a shrill voice while secretly thinking that it would be nice if such a thing were to happen.

“Thank you for waiting. The total is two thousand gauls.”

Kazaya started to feel like things would take a turn for the worse if they stayed there any longer. He took out two paper bills from a leather bag he pulled out of his clothes and put them on the counter.

“Thanks for your help. I’ll come back again soon.”

Kazaya picked up the armor and they left the shop in a hurry.

“Hey, the paper bills you used to pay earlier, is that the currency of this world?”

“Yes, that’s right. Do you want to take a look?”

Kazaya stopped walking and took out a number of coins and paper bills from his leather pouch.

“This is the currency that is used throughout Grimveria, called ‘gauls’. There are coins for denominations up to a hundred, and paper bills for amounts ranging from five hundred to one thousand. It is roughly worth about ten times as much as the Japanese yen.”

“I see... as expected of another world. The currency here is nothing like the currency we use back home.”

Chihiro nodded as if she was impressed, and then suddenly raised her head as if she realized something.

“You said it was worth about ten times as much as the Japanese yen... so this armor is worth twenty thousand yen?”

“That’s about right. We got the Visitor discount, though, so this is actually fairly cheap.”

“I see. Okay, then. I only have Japanese money with me right now, but allow me to pay you back.”

Kazaya saw Chihiro take out her purse, and stopped her.

“That’s fine. It’s on me.”

“I can’t allow a junior to pay for me. And besides, you might use that as a pretext to demand something outrageous from me later on.”

“There’s no way I would do that! What do you take me for?”

“I was joking. It’s okay. If it’s only that much, I can pay it right away.”

“That’s not what I was talking about... Just consider it as a gift from me, for becoming a Visitor. Over here, I’m your Senpai, after all.”

Chihiro looked a little perplexed on hearing that, but she eventually put her purse away.

“I see... Well then, I will happily accept it! Thank you, Tsugami-kun.”

“You’re welcome. I just hope it suits you.”

Chihiro accepted the armor that he handed to her. However, she immediately staggered backwards.

“Uwaah, it’s a lot heavier than it looks! By the way, how do I put this on?”

“Ah, I see. Of course, you wouldn’t know about that yet.”

Kazaya remembered that he too had needed help from another Visitor in the beginning, and wondered what to do about this situation.

“Hey, Tsugami-kun. Can you help me put this on?”

“...Eh!? Me!? Really!?”

He asked for a confirmation because he would not be able to avoid touching her body if he did that, but she just blinked once when she heard his question.

“Yes, but only if you don’t find it disagreeable.Ah, were you thinking of something dirty? That’s no good. Onee-san won’t allow it.”

Chihiro said that and then gave him a bewitching smile. Since her face was already beautiful to begin with, that expression was incredibly seductive.

“E-Ehh? N-No, I wasn’t thinking of anything like that! Really, I didn’t think about anything like that at all! T-There’s no way I would find it disagreeable! Very well. I will humbly assist you in putting it on!”

“I’m not sure why you’re trying so hard to be formal, but please do.”

Kazaya silently took a deep breath, fired himself up, and accepted the armor from Chihiro. He moved to stand behind her and fixed the breastplate in place. There was nothing he could do to keep his fingers from trembling as he did so.

Also, the clasp of the armor didn’t fit properly, so he pushed down on her back lightly while trying to get it in place, and felt something that was strangely hard to touch.

“Ah.Umm, Tsugami-kun. Could you please move your hand away from there?”

“Eh? Why’s that?”

“That’s my underwear you’re touching. It’s a little embarrassing.”

“Uwaaah!?”

“Or would you like to try unfastening it, for the sake of your education for the future?”

Chihiro turned to face him, and the corners of her mouth twitched.

“Nonononononononono, I wouldn’t dare!”

Kazaya raised a hysteric voice, quickly forced the armor clasp into place, and vigorously stepped away. He then automatically prostrated himself on the ground.

“I-I-I’m sorry! I will I will atone for this by cutting open my stomach!”

“H-Hey, you don’t need to cut open your stomach, and please, stand up. Thank you for helping me.”

“N-Not at all! In that case, I will put the elbow guards on.....”

Kazaya somehow managed to attach the elbow guards while being extremely careful.

“.....It’s done.”

Chihiro looked down at her body and then spun around once in place, causing the skirt of her school uniform to flutter elegantly.

“Thank you. It feels great! Still, I don’t think I will be able to have any flashy adventures while wearing this. I might get my school uniform dirty, and there’s a chance my underwear might be seen as well.”

“Ah, that’s right. We will start off with something simple for today, though, so I don’t think you need to worry about that.”

“Okay. I will make sure to wear appropriate clothes next time. Still... I just feel so happy.”

Kazaya tilted his head to one side, and Chihiro explained.

“I have to pretend to be the perfect honors student at school, so I can’t speak to other people casually like this. When I was striving to keep my emotions from rising to the surface, I naturally started to limit the use of my facial muscles as much as possible. Due to that, I seem to have ended up with an expressionless face that makes it hard for other people to approach me. So I was always alone.”

“Eh? Was that also the reason why you would occasionally glare at people?”

“.....I didn’t have any intention of glaring at them. But as I kept telling myself

that I had to deal with people in a level-headed manner, I somehow ended up with that kind of expression. I always feel really bad about that.”

Chihiro was holding her head in regret. However that meant that the same held true for the time when she had spoken to him and Maesaki as well.

“Hey, do the other students hate me after all? Are people avoiding me because they think I’m scary!?”

“N-No, I don’t think that is the case at all!”

If anything, that behavior of hers was causing the number of her fans to increase, but he decided to not talk about that for now.

“Umm, don’t you have any friends?”

“My classmates will talk to me, but there’s no one that I am really close to. I’m more or less used to it now, but there are still times when I feel really lonely.”

“That’s all because of your father’s instructions, right? I think that’s quite horrible!”

Seeing Kazaya get angry, Chihiro smiled bitterly.

“Perhaps. But since I was born into the Mikoto family, I have no choice.”

Saying that, she closed her eyes for a moment.

“But when I came to this place—Grimveria—I realized something. If nobody here knows me, I should be able to start over. I can go on adventures and make friends, just like I always wanted. That is why I got ahead of myself and called out to you, without thinking of the consequences.”

“.....I see.... In that case, getting summoned to this place must have been a stroke of good fortune for you.”

“Very much so. That’s why I plan on working hard! Tsugami-kun, I would be glad if you could teach me about all sorts of things!”

“Of course! If you have any questions about Grimveria, please feel free to ask!”

Kazaya held up his fist and answered energetically, and Chihiro nodded

strongly.

“Well then, we’ve finally got you some armor, so would you like to try going to an island?”

“Yes, please! Uuu, I’m getting excited!!”

Chihiro said that as if she was truly happy from the bottom of her heart, and raised both her hands into the air. Seeing her act that way after hearing about her circumstances just earlier raised Kazaya’s spirits as well.

Kazaya raised his own hand and gave Chihiro a high-five.

“Kazaya-san! Found you!”

At that moment, Kazaya found himself being hugged by someone all off a sudden. He looked around, but there was no one around him. But when he pointed his gaze downwards, he saw a girl there.

Judging from her appearance, she was probably around thirteen or fourteen years old. She had fluffy golden hair, and her face, with large, round eyes and cheeks puffed up like freshly-baked bread, still gave an impression of her youth. She was wearing an apron over a checkered dress and her trousers looked short enough to be called hot pants.

“Hey there, Nina. How have you been?”

“Yes! Nina has been doing great! It’s such a coincidence, meeting you here!”

Nina looked up while still hugging him and gave him a bright smile. As usual, she appeared to be the personification of innocence. Judging by the paper bags she had set down on the ground, she must be on her way back home from shopping.

“Nina is so happy that she was able to meet you in a place like this! This must be fate!”

“It’s not something so exaggerated.”

“No, it is definitely fate. The two of us are fated to be together under any circumstances. In other words, it is our destiny!”

“It’s ‘destiny’. I see you still remember the words that I taught you.”

“I revise them everyday before going to sleep!”

“That’s great.”

Kazaya praised her, and Nina looked proud of herself.

“Ah, so this child is the Nina-chan you were talking about earlier? She’s so cute!”

However, Nina was taken aback when Chihiro came to stand next to Kazaya, and she drew away from him.

“A-An unknown person is standing next to Kazaya-san!? Who is she?”

“Hello, my name is Mikoto Chihiro! It’s nice to meet you, Nina-chan. Would you mind if I hugged you!?”

“Yes, I would! Nice to meet you! My name is Nina!”

After returning Chihiro’s greetings, Nina turned to face Kazaya and raised her hand.

“Who is this person, Kazaya-san!? Nina has never seen this person before!”

“She’s my senior from school in the world I live in. You remember what a school is, right?”

“Yes, Nina remembers! Why is that senior here with you?”

“She is a Visitor as well. She was summoned here yesterday. She is going to start exploring the islands along with me starting today.”



Nina staggered back two or three steps as if she was shocked by Kazaya's words.

“She’s going to be exploring the islands together with Kazaya-san... does that mean the two of you will constantly be together?”

“Well, that’s true.”

“Haaau!”

Nina let out a loud shout all of a sudden, turned around, and crouched down while hugging her knees.

“Such an unexpected critical situation... Nina, who was ahead of all the others due to her position as an employee of the inn that Kazaya frequents, is in danger of losing her position for the first time? No, perhaps this new opponent will actually surpass her...”

“Nina? What are you muttering about over there?”

Kazaya called out to her because he felt that she was acting strangely, and Nina stood up and once again turned to face him.

“Mikoto-san!”

“You can call me Chihiro! Nina-chan, would you mind if I patted your head!?”

“Yes, I would! Chihiro-san! Please keep this in mind!”

Nina suddenly pointed energetically at Chihiro.

“Nina has been taking care of Kazaya-san ever since he first came to this world and entered our store! I thought him all about Grimveria when he was still a complete beginner! Isn’t that right, Kazaya-san!?”

“Yes. I am very thankful.”

“You’re welcome! That’s why, the relationship between Nina and Kazaya-san is... How do I put it... we are very close, or rather, we have a deep relationship.... That’s right—we are in an intimate relationship!”

“Nina. think about how you word it more carefully.”

Kazaya urged Nina to correct herself to prevent Chihiro from having some sort of horrible misunderstanding, but Nina wasn’t listening to him.

“That’s why, even if you are a senpai from school, a person like you who just appeared a day ago cannot get in between Nina and Kazaya-san! Please make

sure you remember that!”

After speaking continuously, Nina put her hands on her waist as if she was satisfied. It looked like she was boasting after having won some mysterious battle.

“I see! I understand! By the way, would you mind if I lifted you up!?”

“How many times should I say that you can’t do that!? Why have you been trying to get closer to Nina since earlier!?”

“That’s because you’re so cute! But let me tell you one thing, Nina-chan. Even though you and Tsugami-kun share a bond, you can’t let down your guard!”

“W-Why is that!?”

“Tsugami-kun and I will be together both in Grimveria and in our world, after all. In other words, I will be spending twice as much time with him as you! I will deepen my bond with him twice as fast as you. Will you still be able to win!?”

“Haaaaaaaau!?”

Nina opened her eyes wide as if she had just realized a shocking truth, and took a step backwards.

“T-That’s right... Nina was careless....! Uwaaaah! Kazaya-saaaan!”

After shouting out all of a sudden, Nina hid behind Kazaya.

“P-Please! Take Nina back with you to your world as well!”

“No, that’s impossible. The people from this world cannot travel to my world. You know that, right?”

It had already been proven that the Teleportation Stones did not have any effect when used by the people from this world. It would be bad for people from Grimveria to go to Earth, so this was an obvious safety measure to take.

“T-Then you can just live here in this world forever, Kazaya-san!”

“Don’t say something so unreasonable...”

“Give up, Nina-chan. Tsugami-kun belongs to me!”

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaahn!”

“Senpai, stop teasing Nina. This girl is innocent so she’ll believe anything.”

Kazaya stared at Chihiro with a puzzled expression after letting out a sigh.

“No, I was being serious.”

“Eeh!?”

“Tsugami-kun, you are the first person who is not a family member to accept my true personality. My relationship with you is extremely precious. So I will compete seriously with anyone who tries to take that away from me, even if the opponent is such a cute little girl! So prepare yourself, Nina-chaaaaan!”

“”Hiiiiiiii, a powerful foe has appeared!”

Nina buried her face into Kazaya’s waist as if she was frightened.

“.....T-Thank you very much.”

Having something like that said straight to his face was embarrassing even for Kazaya, and he looked downwards.

“Hmm? Why are you thanking me? If anything, I should be thanking you.”

“No, it’s just that I didn’t think the day would come when you would say something like that about me, Senpai.”

He felt like he was going red all over his body.

“Uuuu... They are so close.... They are too close...!”

Nina started to sniffle while mumbling that.

“Well, putting that aside, I hope the two of us can get along as well, Nina-chan.”

“Muuuuu.... Okay.”

After Nina replied reluctantly, Chihiro patted her head.

“Anyway, Nina, Senpai and I are going to the harbor now. Do you want to come along with us until then?”

Nina nodded while still pressing her face into his clothes.

As the three of them walked along the street, the ocean eventually came into sight in the distance.

At the same time, the number of people wearing armor like Kazaya and Chihiro also increased. They were Visitors.

“I thought the same thing when we went to the bar, but the Visitors all look quite young. Are all of them teenagers or in their twenties?”

Chihiro’s guess was correct. The people who came to Grimveria were pretty much all young people in that age range.

“I think the goddess is selecting people from the age group who are likely to have the most endurance.”

“I suppose that makes sense. Are there Visitors from places other than Earth? Like aliens.”

“I don’t know, but the Central Continent is quite large, after all. I haven’t met any people like that so far.”

No matter where they are from, as long as they are in Grimveria, they will be able to understand each other. Even if there were people who came from other planets, as long as they looked like humans it would be hard to tell the difference.

“Oh? If it isn’t Kazaya! It’s been a while! Ah, I see Nina is with you as well!”

A young man with a muscular body and short hair called out to Kazaya all of a sudden, came closer to him, and started thumping him on his back. He wasn’t wearing any armor, but had a massive iron construction equipped on his right arm. The construction covered his whole arm, including his fist, and the part that was on the back of his hand was unusually thick. At a glance, it looked like a robotic arm that one would see in some anime on television.

“Oh it’s you, Souya. Fancy meeting you here.”

“No need to sound so distant, just call me Tohru! We’re buddies, aren’t we? Hahaha!”

The young man once again thumped him on the back.

“Shut up Tohru. How many time do I gotta tell you to rein in your volume while talking?”

The young girl who appeared from behind him was covering her ears like she

as truly fed up. She was wearing a simple breastplate just like Chihiro, and a single knife gleamed at her waist.

“Oh, you were here as well, Kotobuki? Are the two of you going to clear islands together?”

“I can’t let that pass, Kazaya. Why would I work together with a noisy and hot-blooded man like this who has muscles for brains?”

“That’s a harsh way to put it.”

“Hahaha! She’s right, so I can’t say anything in my defence!”

The young man laughed expansively. Seeing that, the girl frowned even more.

“Hello, Tohru-san and Izumi-san!”

“Hey there, Nina! ”

“I see you’re still as small and cute as ever.”

After the two of them returned her greetings, both of them started patting her head.

“Tsugami-kun, are they friends of yours?”

Chihiro tugged at his clothes from behind and asked him that.

“Yes. Both of them are Visitors, just like us. Their names are Souya Tohru and Kotobuki Izumi. We’ve worked together a few times while exploring on islands, and since we are around the same age, we got along well. The two of them are also regular patrons of the Spring Bell Inn, so Nina knows them as well.”

“Hmm. So they are a team, just like you and me, Tsugami-kun?”

“No, Kotobuki wasn’t kidding about what she said earlier, it’s just that the two of them often end up together by pure chance.”

“Oh, I see. So do Visitors usually work alone?”

“No, not necessarily. A lot of people work in teams. The two of them also apparently work with other people as well. Well, working like that makes it easier to clear the islands, after all.”

As Kazaya explained that to Chihiro, Izumi looked over at them.

“Hmm? Is that newcomer?”

“Yes, I’m Mikoto Chihiro! Nice to meet you!”

Chihiro bowed her head towards Izumi, and Izumi nodded in return.

“Yeah, nice to meet you. Ah, you don’t need to bother with this noisy and hot-blooded man who has muscles for brains.”

“Oioioi, that’s harsh, Izumi!”

“Like I said, shut the hell up!”

Tohru yelled loudly near Izumi’s ears, and she kicked him without holding back.

“Ouch! That hurt, hahahaha!”

Tohru just laughed it off cheerfully and didn’t seem to mind at all.

“.....It feels like they two of them are quite interesting.”

“Yes, in more ways than one.”

Kazaya nodded and agreed with Chihiro, and then called out to the two of them.

“By the way, which island are the two of you going to?”

“Ah, we’re going to Island #1.”

Izumi replied to his question, but Kazaya found it odd.

“Island #1? The two of us are going there as well. But that place is for beginners, right? Isn’t it way too simple for the two of you, Kotobuki?”

“That’s right, but one of the taverns I frequent put out a request for some plants that only grow on Island #1. Just when I decided to take that request, I ran into this fool.”

Izumi glared at Tohru who was standing beside her as she explained.

“I was planning to go there on a separate request to kill some demonic beasts! Hahaha! Izumi, don’t you think the two of us are bound by fate!?”

“Say anything more, and I’ll kill you.”

“Hahaha! So scary!”

Kazaya accepted their explanations while listening to their usual bickering.

“So you’re training the newcomer? It’s pretty rare for you team up with another Visitor, Kazaya.”

“Is that so?”

Chihiro asked Izumi while tilting her head, but Tohru answered her instead.

“Yeah, Kazaya is always alone after all! I’ve asked him to team up with me a few times, but he always finds some excuse to turn me down!”

“The same goes for me as well. So I just assumed he didn’t like to team up with other people.”

“It’s nothing like that.... Even when playing online games, I was basically a solo player. I think that way just suits me better.”

Kazaya said that and turned towards Chihiro.

“Ah, but that doesn’t mean I don’t want to work with you, Senpai! I’ll make sure to teach you everything you need to know until you are able to work by yourself!”

“Sure. Thank you, Tsugami-kun.”

Seeing Chihiro smile at Kazaya, Izumi lowered her shoulders and spoke.

“Well, I don’t really get it, but do your best. It’s about time for me to leave.”

“I’m going as well!”

“How many times do I have to tell you to stop following me, Tohru!?”

“We just ended up going in the same direction! Hahaha!”

Izumi walked towards the harbor with Tohru, even though she kicked him several times along the way.

“Are the two of them always that way? They are like oil and water.”

“Well, for the most part. Despite that, they are still on good terms.”

Kazaya slumped his shoulders and started walking again, but...

“Oh? Hey, it’s Kazaya! How have you been? On your way to clear some islands?”

“Hey there, Kazaya. You’re the one who defeated the boss on that last island, right? I see you’re still as amazing as always!”

“Eh, so that’s Kazaya!? No way, this is my first time seeing him!”

“Same here. He looks surprisingly ordinary.”

Many people called out to Kazaya, and a lot of people started whispering about him as he passed by. No matter if it was Visitors or people from Grimveria, they all showed some sort of reaction when they saw Kazaya.

“.....You’re really popular, aren’t you, Tsugami-kun?”

Chihiro said that as if she was surprised.

“What are you saying all of a sudden? Even among the large number of Visitors, Kazaya-san stands at the very top!”

Kazaya was about to answer her, but Nina replied faster than him.

“Ever since he first came here a few months ago, he has continued to produce remarkable results, and successfully cleared many islands that were said to be impossible to clear! Also, thanks to the raw materials, food ingredients, and valuable treasures he brings back each time, the economy of Reancos is soaring! There are even rumors that he is going to receive a medal of honor from the King himself in the near future!”

“Oh? That’s amazing, Tsugami-kun!”

“It’s not that big a deal. I was just doing it for fun, and at some point it ended up like this.”

As for Kazaya, he just thought of it like completing quests in a game. Due to that, he was a little confused by the overexaggerated impression that people seemed to have about him.

“It’s something I would have never imagined, after seeing how you look when you’re sitting in the classroom at school!”

“Haha. Well, I’m unremarkable, after all. There’s nothing I’m particularly good

at.”

“What are you talking about? The only thing that matters is the strength of your heart!”

“I’m glad that you’re trying to cheer me up, but please don’t agree with my words in a roundabout way.”

“.....I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Chihiro openly looked away from him. Kazaya scratched his head while thinking that he didn’t really mind because it was the truth, after all.

“Still, you are a hero in this world, right? That’s amazing.”

Kazaya looked bashful when Chihiro said that. He felt happier to hear that from her compared to anyone else.

“Uuuuuuuuu.”

However, he realized that Nina was puffing up her cheeks in a strange manner next to him, so he shifted his attention to her.

“What’s wrong, Nina?”

“.....It’s nothing.”

Kazaya reached the harbor while still feeling puzzled by how Nina turned her face away from him like she was dissatisfied about something.

There were a number of boats waiting at the wharf. They were used to travel to the islands.

“It’s finally time, Senpai. Are you ready for your first taste of exploring Grimveria?”

“Yes!”

Chihiro nodded strongly with a large smile on her face.

“Well then, Nina, it is time for us to go. See you later.”

“Yes! You definitely have to stop by at our store when you get back!”

Kazaya and Chihiro boarded a boat while waving to Nina.

Before long, the boat left the harbor and nimbly cut through the calm ocean.

“I never imagined that the day would come when I would head for an uninhabited island on a sailing boat.”

Chihiro spoke while standing on the deck and resting her hand against the railing. The intermittent salty breeze caused her long hair to flutter.

“.....I wonder what my father would say if he found out.”

Chihiro muttered that and laughed softly. Maybe she imagined herself getting scolded.

“Still, I can’t exactly tell him about this. Even if I did, I would just be called a liar and treated like an idiot.”

“That’s right. Only the people who have been summoned here by the goddess can use the Teleportation Stones.”

“That’s right. I suppose it would be a problem if too many people from our world came over.”

“That is one reason, and the other is a matter of selecting the right people. Calling over someone with evil intentions would be terrible, after all.”

“I see, that’s a good point. So, as far as possible, the goddess is summoning only relatively harmless people over? Well then, I’ll make sure not to tell anyone else about this world, for the goddess’s sake as well!”

“Yes. It’s a secret.”

“That’s right.It’ll be our little secret.”

Saying that, Chihiro put her long and slender finger on her light pink lips. That mischievous gesture contrasted with her usual grown-up appearance and was strangely charming.

(“Our little secret”, huh....)

Kazaya reflected on that phrase and thought that it had a nice ring to it.

The boat reached the island after a short while.

A gangplank was run out to the shore, and the two of them used that to disembark.

There were a number of other Visitors as well, and all of them headed into

the deeper parts of the island and vanished from sight.

“Right then, let’s begin. The demonic beasts here are relatively weak so you don’t need to be afraid of them, but you still shouldn’t let down your guard—”

“Amazing! It’s like a tropical resort! Wow!”

Chihiro had started to sprint on the beach with all her strength.

“H-Hey! Listen to what I’m saying, Senpai! Wait up!”

Kazaya panicked and chased after her. Once they crossed the beach, they entered a thick and dense forest that was shrouded in darkness even during the day due to the trees.

“Tsugami-kun! Where are the demonic beasts!? Where are they, how do you defeat them, and what happens after you defeat them?”

Chihiro glanced about with sparkling eyes.

“Please stop looking for demonic beasts as if you are searching for mascot characters at an amusement park!”

“Come now, Tsugami-kun! Defeating the mascot characters at an amusement park will just cause the police to come running! It would be rude to the demonic beasts to compare them to something like that!”

“Wait, you’re defending the demonic beasts instead!?”

Kazaya spoke while he was out of breath.

“P-Please calm down for now. There are many things that I have to explain to you.”

“Fine. I understand, so hurry up, faster, faster, faster! Tsugami-kun, hurry up!”

Chihiro was so excited that she was not able to keep her feelings under control, and stamped on the ground impatiently. Was this really the calm and self-possessed Mikoto Chihiro that he knew about? Even if he told the people at school about this, it was certain that nobody would believe him.

“Like I said, calm down first. Senpai, do you remember when I said that all Visitors are given four things when they are summoned over here?”

“Ah, that’s right, I remember. One of them is the Teleportation Stone, so what

are the other three?”

Kazaya glanced around. He saw a stone that was lying on the ground nearby, and picked it up.

“Here, catch.”

Chihiro caught the stone that he had tossed towards her. She tilted her head slightly to one side, probably because she didn’t understand what he was trying to do.

“Please throw that stone at me. As hard as you can.”

“Eh, is that really okay? Won’t you get hurt?”

“It will be fine. Please go ahead.”

Kazaya urged her to proceed. Chihiro hesitated for a while, but she eventually drew her hand back and wound up like a baseball pitcher.

“—Uryaaaaaa!”

She let out a yell, and at the same time sent the stone flying towards him.

The stone cut through the air and was on the verge of colliding with his forehead.

However, the stone made a loud noise as it collided with something that looked like a barrier that had appeared out of nowhere, lost its momentum, and fell to the ground.

“You really didn’t hold back at all, huh!?”

“But you asked me to do that! I thought I might never get the chance again!”

While Kazaya wondered what kind of chance she was talking about, Chihiro looked at the stone that was lying on the ground.

“More importantly, what was that just now? I think I saw something that looked like a wall, appear out of nowhere.”

“It’s called a 『Protective Barrier』. It is something like the goddess’s divine protection. When you are attacked by enemies or about to get injured due to an accident like what happened earlier, something like an invisible barrier will appear to protect you from harm.”

“.....Ah. I remember the goddess telling me about something like that. She also said that I would be able to sense the durability of the barrier if I focused on it or something.”

“That’s right. Please try and do that. It might be easier if you imagine stroking the air gently while trying to do that.”

Chihiro followed Kazaya’s instructions and gently traced her finger through the air.

When she did that, a red, cylindrical gauge appeared at the edge of her field of vision, near the top right corner.

“That is the durability. It is something like the HP gauge you would find in games. Your Protective Barrier will break when that bar is completely empty, so please make sure to keep an eye on it.”

“So once it breaks I will be vulnerable to injury again?”

“No, you will be forcefully teleported back to that open space in Reancos.”

Rather than calling this a penalty, it might be more appropriate to say that it was something the goddess arranged out of goodwill for the sake of protecting the lives of the Visitors.

“That is why you should always stay alert while taking action. You must stay aware of your Protective Barrier’s durability at all times. This is one of the most basic things that a Visitor in Grimveria needs to know about.”

“Got it! By the way, do only Visitors have Protective Barriers?”

“I guess so. People from Grimveria say that they can’t use it, after all.”

“Even those strange people who travel to the islands?”

“Probably.”

Kazaya nodded and continued to speak.

“It might be because the total number of such people is fairly low, but it appears that the goddess does not interfere with the lives of people from Grimveria as much as possible.”

It is possible that she originally did not want to bring Visitors over either, but

was forced to take that step in order to deal with some crisis.

“—Anyways, the other two things are the 『Divine Works』 and the 『Insect Cage』. Rather than trying to explain them, it would be easier for you to just try it out for yourself...”

As Kazaya was speaking, the nearby undergrowth suddenly became noisy. Not long after, something appeared in front of them.

At first glance, it looked like a jelly that someone had thrown away. It was a poisonous-looking shade of light blue, as if food coloring had been used to make it that way, and it was trembling constantly. However, it was slowly crawling towards them like a slug, as if to prove that it was alive.

“Uwaah, what’s that!?”

Chihiro hid behind Kazaya, probably because she found it to be creepy.

“It is a demonic beast, called a 『Slime Jelly』. Good timing, this is the perfect opponent for a beginner. Senpai, you should try and fight it.”

“Eh, me?”

“There’s no point if I defeat it, right? I brought you here today so that you could learn how to be a proper Visitor, Senpai.”

“Ehh.... But it’s all quivery and gross, aren’t there any normal-looking demonic beasts for me to fight against?”

“There’s no such thing. All demonic beasts fall into the following categories; disgusting, scary, strong, and annoying.”

“.....That sounds awful. But seriously, I can’t handle things of this type.”

“Senpai, you might be senior in the other world, but over here, I am your senpai. Please do as I say.”

Kazaya said that because he assumed it would be better to take a strict tone, but that just made Chihiro pout.

“Ah, you’re going to play that card? That’s unfair. Tsugami-kun, just when did you become so heavy-handed? You used to be a lot more honest and gentle back in the day, and you would follow me around everywhere like a puppy.”

“Please don’t fabricate memories! ...You won’t be able to become a proper Visitor unless you clear this hurdle. This is like that story about lions throwing their cubs off cliffs to make them stronger.”

After a little while, Chihiro let out a small sigh and moved to the front.

During that time, the Slime Jelly had continued to move slowly but surely towards them.

“Alright. I’ll do it! Bring it on!”

Chihiro clenched her fist and took a fighting stance. However, after a few seconds, she looked back at him.

“So, what exactly should I do?”

“Why did you act like you knew what you were doing just now?”

“I was just going along with the flow. Anyway, hurry up and tell me what to do. Look, the brine teddy is creepily getting closer little by little. ”

“It’s a Slime Jelly! What the heck is a brine teddy? Please don’t turn it into an even more incomprehensible monster than it already is. Anyways, you have to use your Divine Works. Please focus your will while thinking that you want to defeat the enemy.”

“I have no idea what that means, but... like this?”

Chihiro extended her hand in front of her and closed her eyes. Before long, particles of light appeared in mid-air, gathered together, and took on a shape.

It was a bow. Moreover, it was not a compound bow, but instead looked more like a bow that was used in Japan. However, it did not come with any arrows.

“Wow, that’s amazing! Hey, something appeared!”

“A bow, huh? It suits you, Senpai. So, what is the name of your Divine Works?”

“Umm... Apparently its name is 『Celestial Bow』. The name just popped into my head.”

Chihiro had taken a stance with the bow in her left hand as soon as she

opened her eyes. She then placed the fingers of her right hand on the bowstring as if she was holding an invisible arrow, and slowly drew the string back.

Immediately after she did that, an arrow surrounded by a dazzling light appeared in her hand. It looked like a power that was created by a goddess of myth for the sake of defeating evil.

“That’s good. Now just go ahead and release it!”

As instructed, Chihiro let go of the string. The next instant, the arrow vigorously cut through the air.

However, it just flew past the Slime Jelly without doing any harm.

“....You’re a liar, Tsugami-kun.”

Chihiro narrowed her eyes and glared at him.

“I didn’t say that you would hit it. It’s hard to get the hang of it in the beginning. Please keep trying.”

“Fine! Ei!”

Chihiro fired another arrow. However it once again completely missed the Slime Jelly, stuck upright in the ground, and vanished.

“Ei, ei, ei, ei, ei, ei, ei, ei, ei...!”

She fired several times, but all of her shots missed the target and ended up as wasted shots. The Slime Jelly was not dodging them. It was just that Chihiro’s arrows were following a weird path.

“Senpai... You’re really bad at this.”

Kazaya unconsciously said that aloud, and Chihiro, who was out of breath, suddenly froze in place.

“I-I’m not bad at it! I’m just a beginner! It can’t be helped because I’m a beginner!”

“No, even considering that, this is a little... umm, how do I put it, your skills are fairly ‘special’.”

“It’s too late to try and make me feel better! Ah, just tell me how to do it right!”

Kazaya scratched his head when he saw Chihiro looking at him angrily with a red face.

“Even if you say that, a bow is outside my area of expertise... Anyway, just calm down and point the arrow at the middle of the target. With a real bow, you would need to consider various things such as what direction the wind is blowing in, but such things are not needed for a Divine Works. Just don’t aim for dead center, it might be better to shift your aim a little.”

“Like this!?”

Chihiro carefully drew back the bowstring and released it.

An instant later, an arrow cut through the air as it flew straight towards the Slime Jelly and pierced its body as if it was getting sucked inside. The demonic beast trembled violently and jumped up.

Chihiro stepped back as if she was wary of what might happen next, but the opponent suddenly stopped moving.

Or so she thought, but then it exploded along with a loud sound. The remaining fragments of its body fell to the ground.

“I-I did it!! I really did it! Tsugami-kun, look, I managed to defeat it!”

Chihiro jumped for joy, and then rushed over to him and hugged him tightly. The sweet smell and soft sensation caused Kazaya’s heart rate to skyrocket.

“Wha— Umm, Senpai!?”

“Hey, did you see it? You saw it, right!? That was amazing. It was much better than any class at school. Tsugami-kun, thank you for teaching me how to do it. It’s all thanks to you!”

“N-No, not at all. Congratulations....”

Kazaya somehow managed to reply even though he was flustered, and Chihiro suddenly came back to her senses.

“Oh... S-Sorry. I wasn’t thinking.”

Chihiro backed away from him with a red face and cast her eyes downward

while clutching the hem of her skirt. That reaction that was typical for a girl her age just made Kazaya's heart beat even faster, and he mirrored her and lowered his gaze as well.

After a while, Kazaya spoke up to break through the awkward silence caused due to embarrassment.

“What you used earlier is a special 『Power』 that is effective against demonic beasts. The power varies from person to person, and my Divine Works is called 『Demonic Sword』.”

Kazaya raised his hand, and a sword appeared. It was a simple sword without any ornamentation.

“When I defeat a demonic beast, I gain the ability to use a 『Sword』 with that demonic beast's abilities.”

“Wow, that's amazing! Do you have many such swords?”

It looked like Chihiro had finally regained her calm, as she was staring at the sword in his hand.

“Yes. The number is equal to the number of demonic beasts that I have defeated.”

“That's cheating. I just have a bow. Trade with me!”

Chihiro stuck her hand out with an unsatisfied expression on her face, and Kazaya smiled wryly.

“That's impossible. People can only use the Divine Works that were bestowed upon them. Based on what I've heard from others, there aren't any other Visitors with Divine Works like mine, so maybe mine is actually pretty rare. But your Celestial Bow will also become more powerful as it grows.”

“Grow?”

“Divine Works grow stronger the more demonic beasts you defeat, and in some cases they gain new abilities. Speaking in terms of a game, it is similar to grinding experience points and raising your skill level.”

“Okay! I don't understand at all!”

Chihiro put her hands up in surrender, and Kazaya was unsure how to proceed. Since he liked games, he had a tendency to use them as examples. How should he explain it so that it would be easy for her to understand?

“Hmm. It is something like the result of hard work that can actually be perceived. There is a fixed objective, and once you reach it you will be able to go further than you can right now.”

“Ah, so that’s what it was. I understand it perfectly now.”

“That’s good. Visitors call that process 『Leveling up』. Now, try and check the durability of your Protective Barrier again like you did earlier.”

As Chihiro followed his directions, Kazaya pointed at a location different from where the gauge was displayed.

“Do you see two numbers around there, one above the other? One of them will be large and the other will be small.”

“Yes, I see them. 1 and 10....?”

“The one on top is your current level, Senpai, and the number on the bottom shows how many demonic beasts you need to defeat in order to change that ‘1’ into a ‘2’.”

“So I need to defeat ten more?”

“That would normally be the case, but defeating a strong demonic beast counts as defeating multiple weak ones, so there are cases where defeating a strong opponent can instantly raise your level.”

“I see.”

Chihiro nodded to show that she understood, and closed the screen that was displayed before her.

“A person who is used to video games would find it easier to understand, but you will eventually get used to it, Senpai.”

“I see. So this is what games are like. That’s pretty interesting.”

Chihiro smiled as if her curiosity was piqued.

“Well then, let’s move on to the last step of the process. Senpai, apart from

the Teleportation Stone, you should have been carrying a small box as well when you first appeared in this world, right?”

“Ah, yes. This thing, right? I wondered what it was for.”

Chihiro pulled out a small cube-shaped box and placed it on the palm of her hand.

“I mentioned this earlier as well, but the objective of Visitors is to clear islands, procure things like food, raw materials, and treasure, and take them back to the Central Continent. Raw materials obtained from demonic beasts are also useful in many ways, so we take them back as well. But that doesn’t mean we have to carry around each demonic beast we defeat, as that will obviously impede our ability to fight.”

“That’s right. I might probably get sick of carrying something so heavy and consider pushing all the hard work to you while I relax, Tsugami-kun.”

“Please don’t!”

“I am definitely... going to take it easy!”

“Please don’t declare that with such a serious face. Anyway, that is what this Insect Cage is for. The method to use it is simple. You just open the small hatch on the side and point it at whatever you want to obtain.”

Chihiro opened the hatch on her Insect Cage just as he said. All of a sudden, the remaining fragments of the Slime Jelly trembled, turned into a sphere of light, and got sucked into the box.

“Wow, it’s like a vacuum cleaner. This is pretty convenient, isn’t it?”

“It really is. If you close the hatch, and open it again while saying 『Release』, whatever you stored inside the box will be released outside. By the way, you need to be within one meter distance from something in order to store it in the box. This concludes my explanation of the four abilities given to all Visitors. By the way, you can only use these abilities when you are on an island, so please keep that in mind.”

“I see. They are quite literally divine abilities, right? If not for the fact that this was a different world, I would have assumed there was some trick to it.”

That was true. The fact that all of this was made possible by that overly friendly and pretentious little girl just served to drive the point home even more.

“Alright then, the tutorial is over. You would have eventually remembered all of this on your own, but it’s easier to have someone who is experienced explain it to you.”

“Yes, it was really easy to understand. Alright, now that I have the basics down, let’s keep moving forward!”

Chihiro was gradually getting more and more excited, and it looked like she might run off by herself at any second.

“Ah, wait, hang on! For today, please stay behind me. Like I said earlier, even though this island is suitable for beginners, it can still be dangerous.”

“A true explorer will move forward without caring about danger, right!? See you around!”

As Chihiro once again made to dash off by herself, Kazaya panicked and grabbed her arm.

“Wait! I want you to promise me this. Stay behind me. Don’t run off by yourself all of a sudden. Even if you see something interesting, do not approach it carelessly. Do not eat anything that is fallen on the ground or if it looks strange.”

“Ah, you’re treating me like a little kid! Even though I’m your senpai.”

“If you really think that, then please act your age! If anything, you’ve been behaving like you’re younger than me ever since you came to this world, Senpai!”

Chihiro put her hands on her hips and stared at Kazaya as he let out a sigh.

“.....Well, I suppose that is true. Sorry, I was acting a little too freely.”

However she eventually said that and came to stand behind him.

“In that case, I will be relying on you, Tsugami-kun.”

Kazaya felt a strange sensation akin to being tickled when she called out to

him in a soft voice.

Kazaya cleared his throat and resumed their exploration of the forest.

“By the way, how far are we going to go today?”

“Hmm... I think we should keep going as far as we can. I’m here to watch over you as well, so it would be good if you can go all the way up to defeating the boss if possible. The island boss stands above all the other demonic beasts, and it is incomparably stronger compared to the rest of them, but due to that you can get a lot of experience by defeating it. You will be able to raise your level right away.”

“I see. But isn’t that a bit unfair? Something like using a cheat... umm, what do you call it... an exploit? Games have things like that, don’t they?”

“Something of this level doesn’t count as an exploit. A new player raising their level while accompanied by an experienced player is something that is done all the time in online games.”

“Oh, I see. That’s like online etiquette, right!?”

“Not at all. Senpai, don’t tell me you don’t use the internet either?”

“.....T-That’s right. I don’t. I also don’t watch dirty videos, unlike you, Tsugami-kun.”

“I-I-I don’t watch them either, okay!? And besides, I’m still underage!!”

Although he did watch the gravure videos of idols posted on their official websites, but Kazaya decided to keep that particular piece of information a secret.

As they were talking about such things, another demonic beast appeared in front of them.

It was skinny creature with a long nose and muddy yellow eyes, and it was wearing only a filthy vest. It was holding a chipped sword in one hand.

Before long, a number of creatures came into view from behind the first one. There were more than ten of them, and they all had an appearance similar to the one that was standing in the front.

“Another one appeared, and it looks like it brought friends!”

“『Class Goblins』, huh... They always work as a group, which makes them tricky to handle. A person is considered an experienced Visitor if they can defeat a group of them by themselves.”

Kazaya raised his hand while standing in front of the Class Goblins.

“Vulgar beasts that eat their own kin and defy the goddess! I will judge you with my power! Ye blade of death that gives birth to storms, appear in my hand—Razor Wind King!”

A sword appeared in Kazaya’s hand in response to his chant. The blade of the sword was so thin that it looked like it might break if you hit it. The Class Goblins raised their offensive voices and attacked Kazaya as a group, probably because they sensed his hostility from his actions.

“Senpai, please stand back. Leave them to me!”

Saying that, Kazaya casually swung his sword. A roaring sound heralded the disturbance caused in the air by his attack.

At the same time, a massive shockwave blew all the Class Goblins away at once.

“Rest, Razor Wind King. Ye who aspires to mow down sins with all-consuming hellfire, appear in my hand— Scorching King!”

After Kazaya spoke those words, the Razor Wind King vanished, and a different sword immediately took its place. The blade was wrapped in blazing flames.

Taking note of the fact that a number of opponents were trying to rise, Kazaya stabbed the sword into the ground.

“Loathsome demonic beasts, burn and disappear!”

Magma erupted from the ground immediately below the Class Goblins. They were engulfed in the magma in an instant without even having the chance to run away. The entire group of demonic beasts received heavy burns and were defeated.

“.....That was incredible. It’s already over.”

Chihiro gazed at the spectacle before her.

“No, it’s still not over. I held back, so they are all still barely alive. You won’t get the experience points unless you kill them yourself, Senpai. Use your arrows to finish them off.”

Chihiro nodded, summoned the Celestial Bow, and fired off arrows one after the other.

As expected from someone who was a quick study, she seemed to have gotten the hang of it already. All her attacks pierced through the Class Goblins, and they stopped moving completely.

“Perfect. Now, use the Insect Cage.”

Chihiro followed his instructions and opened the hatch of her Insect Cage, and the bodies of the Class Goblins were sucked inside.

After she did that, she suddenly heard a cheerful sound coming out of nowhere.

“What is this? Where is it coming from?”

Kazaya spoke to Chihiro who was looking around while covering her ears.

“It’s okay. That’s just a notification from the goddess that you leveled up. Check your display to make sure.”

Chihiro nodded and opened up the display that showed her experience points. She saw that the numbers 『2』 and 『15』 had appeared there. In addition, there was a notification saying 『Remaining: 3』 next to those two numbers.

“Ah, you’re right!Hmm, there’s a different notification that I can use a new skill.”

“When you learn a new skill, the goddess will let you know what kind of skill it is. By the way, the 『Remaining: 3』 means that you can learn another new skill after three more levels.”

“Oh, so that’s how it is. Hmm, it looks like I can make the arrow of light larger and more powerful, although it takes some time.”

“A charged attack, huh? That’s pretty nice. Let’s keep defeating enemies like this and raise your level.”

“Sure! By the way, Tsugami-kun, can I ask you something?”

“Sure, what is it?”

Kazaya replied to her as she started to walk.

“Why did you start acting a little cool back then when you were fighting?”

Kazaya involuntarily stopped walking.

“.....I-I did that?”

“Yeah. You said something about them eating their own kin and defying the goddess. You also said something long and complicated when you summoned your demonic swords, but is that absolutely necessary? I didn’t need to say anything to summon my weapon.”

“W-Well, you see, umm... it’s not strictly required, per se, but...”

(Crap.)

Kazaya felt a chill run down his spine. It looked like his usual idiosyncrasies had come to the fore.

“Why did you do that if it’s not required? Is there some other reason behind it?”

“Umm... that is... I just wanted to make it more game-like, I guess.”

He couldn’t say the real reason. There was no way he could say it.

(There’s no way I can tell her that I feed my ego by acting like characters from my favorite games, just because this is a different world and nobody can overhear me when I’m on the islands anyway! That would be incredibly embarrassing!)

“Eh? Don’t tell me you were actually taking the effort to pretend that you were a character in a game?”

“Hiiii!”

She saw through him completely.

“So you’re one of those people, huh? Umm... The boys in my class were talking about it. The kind of people who speak using complicated words on purpose, stare off into the distance for no reason, and convince themselves that they have some hidden superpowers... that’s right, eighth-grader syndrome!”

“Hiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii! Please, stop talking about that!”

Kazaya fell to his knees and covered his face with both hands.

“Tsugami-kun, do you have some kind of illness? Have you consulted a medical professional?”

“I-I-It’s not like that, eighth-grader syndrome is not a real illness. How do I describe it... It’s just a sign of wishing to become a hero... Umm, really, there’s nothing wrong with me!”

“Are you really sure about that? Despite saying things like 『Mow down sins with all-consuming hellfire』 and 『Appear in my hand』? Why? What is the purpose of saying things like that? Does it have any meaning?”

“I’m begging you, please stooooooooooooooooop!!”

Kazaya, who was rolling about on the ground while Chihiro spoke, curled up into a ball and lay there trembling.

“.....I don’t really get it, but it feels like pressing any further would be cruel, so I’ll stop here.”

“Thanks, I appreciate it.....”

Kazaya finally managed to recover and stand up, and Chihiro clenched her fist in front of him.

“Still, you were enjoying Grimveria in your own way, right, Tsugami-kun? In that case, it’s fine. Don’t feel obliged to hold back for me, feel free to do that... whatever to your heart’s content!”

“Please stop trying to make me feel better by saying things like that!”

Kazaya yelled with teary eyes. However, he knew Chihiro wasn’t doing it on purpose to tease him, so he decided to set this matter aside for now.

Kazaya walked deeper into the forest along with Chihiro. After that, when

they encountered demonic beasts, Kazaya would first beat them within an inch of their lives and let Chihiro finish them off. In this manner, they continued to take down demonic beasts one after the other.

Despite her clumsy fighting style in the beginning, Chihiro seemed to get the hang of it quickly. Before long, her movements became more decisive and quick. This was probably only natural considering her level of physical fitness.

“Senpai, now!”

Upon hearing Kazaya’s command, Chihiro released an arrow of light that had been powered up to the maximum level.

When that arrow hit the 『Wood Soldier』, a demonic beast that looked like a tree with holes in place of its eyes and mouth, it opened up a large hole in its body. The opponent let out a shriek and fell over with a loud noise.

After putting away its body inside the Insect Cage, she once again heard the music that she had already heard several times before..

“Tsugami-kun, I did it! I’m level 5! It looks like I’ve learned a second skill. Apparently, I can fire two arrows at the same time and freely control the trajectory of any one of them!”

“Congratulations! It looks like your skill is pretty useful as well.”

Despite the fact that he had been helping her, reaching Level 5 in a single day was probably more than enough.

“.....Alright, I guess it should be okay to go looking for the boss now. Speaking frankly, it would be better if you were another one or two levels higher, but it’s getting pretty late.”

Looking upwards, he could see that the sun was already low in the western sky.

“I agree... By the way, does the time in Grimveria pass by at the same rate as that on Earth?”

“Yes, it seems that way.”

“.....That’s bad. Tsugami-kun, I have a curfew. If I don’t get home before six thirty, I’ll get grounded on top of receiving a harsh scolding from my father.”

Kazaya pulled out his smartphone and checked the time. It was still not yet five o'clock.

"Hmm, I think we'll be fine, but only if we find the boss right away."

Chihiro hesitated for a while, but she eventually decided to believe him. She asked him a question as if she was trying to switch gears and get back to the matter at hand.

"Doesn't the boss just stay at a particular location?"

"Demonic beasts are still living creatures, after all. The area around here is supposed to be its territory, but sometimes it moves around quite a bit."

As Kazaya explained that to her, something appeared from within the shadows.

The two of them put up their guard thinking that it was an enemy, but it turned out to be Tohru and Izumi, whom they had met at the harbor earlier. Seeing them, Kazaya remembered that they were coming to the same island as well.

"Hey, Kazaya! What a coincidence! Hahaha!"

"Hey. How's your job going?"

"Well, I managed to finish it somehow! How's the newcomer training coming along!?"

"I am somehow managing to get through, thanks to his accurate advice."

"That's great!"

Chihiro replied to Tohru's question with a smile, and Tohru laughed expansively.

"By the way, I see the two of you are together again. It looks like you are really on good terms."

Izumi frowned when she heard what Chihiro said.

"The place I went to to get what I was hired to retrieve just coincidentally happened to also be the nest of the demonic beast that this guy was chasing. In that case, it's more efficient to work together, right? That's all there is to it!"

“Oi, stop blushing, Izumi! The truth is that you just like to hang out with me, right!?”

“Shut up! And seriously, lower your voice a little, Mr. Low fat percentage!”

“That hurt!”

Tohru received an elbow strike from Izumi and complained of pain despite not showing such an expression on his face at all.

“‘Mr. Low fat percentage’? That’s not even really an insult.”

“I really can’t tell if the two of them are on good terms or not....”

Kazaya and Chihiro were talking among themselves.

“And besides, when I was writing a memo in my notepad, Tohru came over and started repeatedly asking me what I was writing!”

“I was just curious! As for me, just writing down one sentence gives me a headache so bad that I feel like I’m going to faint! I was just thinking how amazing you were, Izumi!”

“If you got any lower as a human being, you would go straight through the earth and come out on the other side! A compliment from someone like you doesn’t make me feel happy at all! Go away!”

“You don’t have to be so embarrassed!”

This time, Izumi stabbed her stiff fingers into Tohru’s stomach, but he just gave a reply that was off the mark without even flinching. Kazaya became even more convinced that the two of them made for a really strange pair.

“Well then, that’s how it is! The two of us will be heading back first!”

“I don’t think you’ll have any problems, considering it’s you, but don’t let down your guard!”

Tohru and Izumi were about to leave, but Kazaya held them back.

“Ah, hang on, Do either of you know where the island boss is?”

“Hmm? Ah, I saw it earlier. I think it should still be in its nest around this time.”

“It was sleeping after all! It’s not going to wake up anytime soon!”

“Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Kazaya bowed and thanked them, and the two of them waved their hands as if to say was no big deal. A short while later, they left and disappeared from sight.

“Did the two of them come to Grimveria for the same reason as you, Tsugami-kun?”

“No. Souya said that he loved nature, and that he was in the mountaineering club at school.”

“True, this world seems like the perfect place for someone like him. How about Kotobuki-san?”

“Ah, despite her looks... I guess putting it that way is rude. She wants to become an author. Moreover, she wants to write fantasy stories, so it’s perfect for her. Adventuring in Grimveria, I mean.”

“That’s... quite the stroke of good fortune.”

“I think so too.”

Kazaya nodded and agreed with her. If she used the knowledge gained in this place, she would be able to write a very realistic story about traveling to another world.

“It looks the people who came here have a wide variety of goals.”

“That’s right. Well then, we should go ahead in order to achieve our own goal.”

Following the advice he received from Tohru and Izumi, Kazaya moved towards their destination.

They walked for some distance through the trees. After a while, they started to hear what sounded like earthquake tremors.

Kazaya put his finger on his lips, warning Chihiro to be silent. He retreated into the shadows and gestured towards the front with his chin.

There was a strange creature in the direction that he indicated. It resembled a giant, plucked chicken.

It had pink skin covered in gooseflesh, a sharp beak, and small wings that would be useless for flying. Three toes extended from each leg that were as thin as branches, and it was perched heavily on the ground.

However, its eyes were closed and it showed no signs of moving. There was a strange donut shaped construct made of straw nearby. That must be its nest.

“It’s the 『Panic Chicken』. This island’s boss.”

“It certainly looks like a chicken monster. It’s massive! I wonder, how many people do you think could eat their fill if you turned it into fried chicken? I think I could manage to eat it in an hour, but considering that size, it might take longer.”

“Senpai, stop moving the conversation along based on the premise that we are going to eat it. Besides, does it really look like one person could eat all of that?”

“Don’t worry, Tsugami-kun, I’ll let you have some too. Like the meat that is between the bones.”

“That’s the part of the meat that people usually give up on because it is the hardest to get at, right!? Anyways, putting that matter aside. Just like the two of them said earlier, it looks like it is fast asleep. We’re lucky. Let’s begin the attack.”

“Eh, we’re going to fight something that big?”

“All the island bosses are about that size. It’ll be fine. It’s not as strong as it looks.”

Kazaya whispered in a low voice and created a demonic sword. It had no particular special powers, and it was the one Kazaya had possessed since the beginning. He usually used this sword when the enemy was so weak that he had to hold back, or when he wanted to test what sort of abilities it had.

“The only thing you need to watch out for is that thing’s 『Shriek』. In other words, if it doesn’t cry out, this will be a piece of cake. I’ll attack first. Please

deliver the finishing blow once it becomes weak enough.”

Kazaya moved out after Chihiro nodded. He carefully got closer to the Panic Chicken.

(First, I'll cut its throat to keep it from crying out. After that, I'll cut its legs and bring it down. That should do it.)

He had fought against this demonic beast several times. The proper method to fight it was ingrained into his body.

Kazaya crouched down all of a sudden. The creature's throat was still some distance away, but at this range it should not be a problem.

Kazaya was aware of the fact that the physical abilities of people who were summoned to Grimveria were elevated to some extent. Probably to make it easier to fight.

That is why, when Kazaya kicked off from the ground, his body rose several meters into the air.

The demonic beast's throat was right before his eyes. He raised his sword and prepared to slash it in a straight line across its throat—

However, at that moment, a wild roar rang out from a place close by. When he looked in that direction, he saw that a different demonic beast was getting closer to Chihiro. It was a 『Gran Mouse』, a demonic beast that looked like a mouse but was about the size of a human.

“Crap! Senpai!”

Kazaya called out to her, but she was already quite experienced. She no longer panicked like she had done in the beginning, and calmly called forth her bow and started attacking the opponent immediately. The arrows that she fired found their mark, and the Gran Mouse fell to the ground, defeated.

However, that still left one problem.

When Kazaya looked back towards the Panic Chicken, he saw that its eyes were fully open. It looked like it was wide awake. Kazaya once again readied his weapon, but it was too late. The creature had already opened its beak—

A shriek rang out that seemed loud enough to rip his eardrums to shreds. It

sounded like someone loudly scraped their nails across a blackboard right next to his ears, and Kazaya plugged his ears closed. This shriek was the reason why this creature had been given the name 'Panic Chicken'.

After Kazaya just landed on the ground, unable to do anything, he received a sudden charge from the creature. His Protective Barrier protected him from the direct damage, but the impact forced him backwards.

"Tsugami-kun...!? Are you okay!?"

Chihiro ran closer to him to check on his condition.

"Thanks to the barrier, I'm not injured. Although I'm not sure about my ears."

Even Chihiro's voice sounded faint, like it was coming from somewhere far away.

"Now that it has come to this, getting close to it is impossible. The moment you get close to it, you'll get hit with that shriek."

"What should I do? Should I try my luck with my bow?"

"That's right, let's do that. But just shooting at it normally won't work. Despite that size, that thing moves very fast, so it will probably just dodge your attacks. And so..."

Kazaya turned around, and looked back at her.

"—For now, let's run away."

Saying that, he dashed away.

"Eeh? We're just going to run away!?"

Kazaya replied to Chihiro who was following him.

"Sometimes, to solve a problem, you have to tackle it from a different angle."

Obviously, the Panic Chicken was pursuing them. Apparently, humans and demonic beasts were alike in the regard that they would get angry when woken up against their will.

Kazaya ran past the trees in the forest as fast as he could, and when he reached a certain large tree, he turned to the right.

“Please follow me! Back when I was still a beginner, I came to this island so many times that the layout is burned into my memory!”

After a short time, the two of them reached the edge of the forest, and instead found themselves looking at a narrow path that ran between two rock faces. Kazaya ran towards it without hesitation. However, after moving down that path for a short distance, they found themselves at a dead end. Looking up at the rock face, it was apparent that it would be difficult to climb.

Kazaya turned around. The Panic Chicken had forced its massive body into the narrow path, and was pushing its way towards them with a terrifying amount of strength while scraping against the rocks on either side.

“Haah— ‘Tis indeed the height of recklessness. But remember this, thou cannot defeat me with mere strength, and only tragic defeat awaits ye. Thy assault is akin to a single, weak soldier attacking a sturdy fortress!Ah.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it. You can keep talking.”

“.....Umm... Y-Ye fist of steel that crushes all things, appear in my hand— Cavern King!”

Kazaya raised his hand and grabbed the the hilt of the sword that had appeared. There was a spiral of energy wrapped around the blade, like a snake coiled around a tree trunk.

Without wasting any time, Kazaya stabbed that blade into the ground and chanted.

“Cry out— 『Pulverise』!”

A loud roar rang out. A large hole suddenly appeared in the ground, a little distance away from them.

The hole had appeared in front of the Panic Chicken, right where it was about to move next. The Panic Chicken fell into the hole, just as Kazaya had planned. It struggled painfully, but it was apparent that it would not be able to leave the hole anytime soon.

“Senpai, now!”

Following his instructions, Chihiro immediately activated her Divine Works,

pulled back the string of her bow, and shot an arrow.

The arrow flew true and crushed the throat of the Panic Chicken.

The Panic Chicken cried in a muffled voice and its eyes turned upwards into its head.

“With this, it can’t shriek anymore. The rest is simple.”

Kazaya made the Caven King vanish, and once again summoned a simple sword like he had done earlier.

“Suffer the despair of the abyss, demonic beast!”

Kazaya ran close to the Panic Chicken, and slashed it.

He slashed it again for a second, third, and fourth time, chipping away at the enemy’s endurance. The Panic Chicken struggled violently in the beginning, but eventually, its movements became feeble. That looked like a good time.

“Senpai, use the Charged Shot!”



As Chihiro turned towards the target and readied her bow, light started to gather in her hand. It got bigger with each passing second, and eventually it

reached a giant size.

“Let’s do this— Teaaaaaaaah!”

When Chihiro released that arrow, it flew through the air while gouging a furrow in the ground before it, and pierced through the Panic Chicken. After letting out one last cry of agony, the enemy went limp while gazing blankly upward.

“We did it! We did it! Our teamwork paid off, Tsugami-kun!”

After innocently jumping up and down a few times, Chihiro came closer and opened the hatch of the Insect Cage. As soon as the body of the Panic Chicken turned into a sphere of light and got sucked into the box, she heard a loud sound.

“.....Amazing! I went up three levels all at once!”

Chihiro’s eyes opened wide after she confirmed her status.

“That’s about right, considering that you defeated a boss. You did good, Senpai!”

Chihiro looked at Kazaya and smiled after he praised her.

“Tsugami-kun, you’ve fought this boss before, haven’t you? Doesn’t that mean that the boss should have already been dead?”

“Ah, that’s right. Both the bosses and the regular demonic beasts will resurrect a while after they are exterminated.”

“Eh!? Really? It feels like there’s not much point in defeating them after all.”

“That’s not true. The raw materials we get from them are useful, and defeating bosses gives us the experience points we need to level up. What’s more, once an island boss is defeated, the other demonic beasts on that island become noticeably weaker until the boss resurrects. Although the reason for that is not known.”

“Ah, I see. Now I understand why the boss is so important.”

“For that reason, Visitors who are able to defeat bosses gain a lot of respect in this world. Even from other Visitors.”

That is why all the Visitors try and defeat an island boss if they can. Just like how players of an online game try and defeat an area boss.

“In any case, congratulations on your first successful island clear, Senpai.”

“Thank you! Aah, there’s no way you can experience such a sense of accomplishment on Earth. I might really get addicted to this! Still, I wouldn’t have been able to do any of it without your support, Tsugami-kun.”

“It’s like that for everyone in the beginning. Even I received a lot of help from a person I know when I just started out, which is how I got to where I am now.”

“I see. Even so... I’m grateful.”

Chihiro bowed deeply to him.

“No, I didn’t do anything special... By the way, did you have fun?”

Chihiro nodded strongly when Kazaya asked her that to confirm.

“Yes, of course I did! At first, I thought it would be something like an amusement park, but it’s completely different! It was so exciting and fun! It was super—wait, is ‘super’ the right prefix? Super fun? Duper? Duper fun? What do you call this sort of thing!?”

While watching Chihiro talk incessantly as if she was in a daze, Kazaya found himself infected by her mood and shared in her enjoyment.

“That’s great! This world is great, isn’t it? It’s a lot more realistic and exciting than any MMO game. I mean, it’s real life after all, so I guess that’s obvious. I mean, it’s a different world that you can experience directly! The system itself is orthodox, but it is structured like a game with clear objectives and it gives a sense of accomplishment just like you said, Senpai. At the beginning, I was so excited to be here as well....”

After actually saying it aloud, Kazaya suddenly realized that at some point he had turned into a complete nerd.

“Ah—Sorry about that, Senpai. I guess I spoke too much.”

“What are you talking about? It’s fine! It’s great how you can talk so passionately about something!”

Chihiro spoke as though she was not troubled by his outburst at all.

“R-Really? It’s not really anything that great, though.”

Praise was the last thing he had expected to hear, so Kazaya scratched his cheek while feeling embarrassed.

“Aah, this feels like a dream. This place is wonderful... Not only can I be myself without having to put up a front, there’s so much fun to be had here.... I’m glad I asked you to bring me here, Tsugami-kun.”

Chihiro’s expression turned serious, and she placed her hand on her chest as if she was making sure of something important.

“T-The same goes for me as well, getting to spend time with you feels like a dream, Senpai.”

“.....Fufu. Thank you.”

Chihiro’s smiling face was tinged with red. Kazaya cleared his throat to bring his soaring feelings back under control.

“Umm, should we head back, then?”

“Ah, that’s right. We finished what we came here to do, after all.”

“Oh, it’s not over yet. We still have to take care of the last step.”

Chihiro slightly tilted her head at Kazaya’s half-joking words.

After that, Kazaya started walking back the way they came, but headed in a different direction from the beach.

After walking for a while, they came to a place that suddenly showed a wide scenery.

It was a small town surrounded by a high wall. There were a number of tall buildings lined up in a row.

“Every island has a town on it. This is where you hand over the items you collected on the island. After that, the merchants who specialize in such things will package the items to make them easier to transport, butcher the demonic beasts, and ship them back to the Central Continent. The towns on islands also have taverns and lodging facilities, so after an island boss is defeated and the

demonic beasts get weaker, there are some Visitors who set up a temporary base camp in the town to actively sweep the island during that time.”

“I see. But don’t they get raided by the demonic beasts?”

Chihiro asked that while looking at the people who were walking along the streets.

“Islands have a particular spot that is called Holy Land, and the boss and other demonic beasts can’t enter that area for some reason. That’s why, the towns are build on top of such areas.”

While answering her question, Kazaya visited a shop that was a slight distance away from the street.

The plot of land that the shop was built on was very spacious, and the shop itself was the size of a school gymnasium.

After entering the building, Chihiro handed over her Insect Cage to the elderly shop owner who was sitting at a counter.

“We are here to exchange these.”

“Hey, Kazaya. How rare to see you around these parts. What’s today’s spoils?”

“Several demonic beasts, and one island boss. Apart from that, there are fruits and other raw materials. Well, considering that we are on Island #1, there’s nothing particularly rare among the loot.”

“Fumu. Give me a minute.”

The shop owner, who seemed to know Kazaya, retreated to a back room.

“What sort of place is this, Tsugami-kun?”

“This is a place where you can exchange the items obtained on islands for this world’s currency. There are a few such places in this town. Well, the exchange rate doesn’t change, so it doesn’t really matter which place you pick.”

A short time later, the shop owner returned and placed the Insect Cage and a cloth bag on the counter.

“I confirmed it in the storeroom at the back of the shop. I’ll contact a trader to

come pick up the items, so leave the rest to me. The payment is two hundred.”

Kazaya thanked him and picked up the Insect Cage and the money bag.

“By the way, Kazaya, when are you going to clear the uncharted islands? Everyone I know is looking forward to the exploits of the 『Lightning-quick wielder of the Demonic Sword』.”

“.....H-Hahaha....”

“Come on, there’s no need to be embarrassed!”

Seeing Kazaya struggle to form a response, the shop owner smacked him on the shoulder and said that.

After they left the shop, Chihiro asked him a question.

“Hey, what does ‘Lightning-quick wielder of the Demonic Sword’ mean?”

“A-Ah. Umm... I don’t really know how it happened, but at some point, people started calling me by that nickname. I suppose they are calling me that because I killed a lot of demonic beasts in a short amount of time.”

“I see. That’s so cool! I want a nickname too. Something like ‘Chihiro, The Apex Predator of the Food Chain’ or something.”

“Why would you want such a dangerous-sounding nickname?”

“I mean, doesn’t it have a powerful ring to it? How does, ‘Chihiro, Killer of Two Birds with One Stone’ sound?”

“That sounds like some sort of bargain sale!”

“What’s wrong with that? It sounds like I would make a healthy profit all the time!”

Chihiro said that in a satisfied manner, and Kazaya smiled bitterly as if to say that he wasn’t so sure about that.

“Anyway, here you go, Senpai.”

Kazaya handed the money bag to Chihiro.

“Eh? You’re giving it to me?”

“You’re the one who killed the boss and most of the demonic beasts today,

Senpai.”

“I was only able to do that because of your help, though....”

“That’s why I am not giving you the whole amount. I already subtracted the guidance fee, so please take it.”

Chihiro initially hesitated to accept the money bag when Kazaya pushed it into her hands, but she eventually accepted it.

“...Money that I earned, huh....”

Chihiro muttered to herself and looked down at the money bag like she was lost in thought. Looking at her from the side, Kazaya saw that she looked happy.

“Senpai, have you never worked part-time?”

“No, I haven’t. My father would not allow it. That’s why... this feels a little strange.”

Chihiro held the money bag close to her chest as though it was very important to her.

“I see. That’s great. Well then, let’s drop by the Spring Bell Inn to say hello and then go back home.”

Chihiro nodded in agreement to Kazaya’s proposal.

After the two of them returned to Reancos and visited the inn, they were welcomed by the innkeeper and Nina. They were invited to stay for dinner, but since Chihiro had to return home before her curfew, they politely declined.

After that, the two of them used their Teleportation Stones to return to Earth. They appeared in front of the school gate. Chihiro looked at the clock that was fixed to the wall of the school building and made an expression of relief.

“Five minutes past six. Looks like we made it back in time.”

When Chihiro turned to look at him, he saw that she had become very subdued, as though her appearance until just earlier was a lie. Her expression was stiff, and overall, she gave off a cold aura.

“.....So you’re back in your usual act?”

“Now that we are back here, there’s no telling who might be watching. I can’t

let my guard down.”

“Looks like you have it rough, Senpai.”

“It’s not that bad.”

Chihiro brushed her long hair with her hand and said that. Looking at her now, it felt like the version of her that he had seen in Grimveria was a hallucination.

“Thank you so much for today. I’ll see you again tomorrow.”

The slanted rays of light from the sun illuminated Chihiro with a beautiful radiance as she waved goodbye and walked away.

Compared to the time they had spent in Grimveria, that sight looked a lot more unrealistic to Kazaya.

Chapter 2 – Grimveria and School, with Senpai

After that day, flying to Grimveria along with Chihiro after school became a part of Kazaya's new daily routine.

"Ah! Look, Tsugami-kun, there's some sort of fruit growing there!"

On a particular day, when the two of them had traveled to Island #2, Chihiro looked up at a tree that resembled a palm tree from their world and said that.

There was certainly something that looked like a massive peach hanging amidst the dense overhead foliage.

"Oh, that's pretty rare. It's a banapeach."

"Banapeach?"

"It looks like a peach, right? But it tastes like a banana. So it's called a banapeach."

".....That's such a straightforward way of naming something."

"Yeah, but trying too hard to give it a more unique name just makes it harder to understand. It sells for quite a high price. Let's pick it."

Kazaya approached the tree and pulled out his Insect Cage.

"Wait a minute! Tsugami-kun, I want to give it a try!"

"Eh? Really? Senpai, have you ever climbed a tree before?"

"No! But that's why I want to try it. Challenging the unknown is what adventures are all about, right!?"

Seeing Chihiro's eyes alight with curiosity, Kazaya decided to leave it to her.

She placed her hand on the tree and carefully made her way upward.

"Please be careful, even though you have the Protective Barrier."

“I know, I’ll be careful!”

Chihiro answered energetically, and Kazaya felt that the expression on her face was one of childish delight.

This was probably the first time she had found the chance to do something like this.

Despite that, she climbed the tree quite skilfully and held up the Insect Cage with the hatch opened towards the banapeach.

After a short while, the banapeach turned into a sphere of light and was sucked into the Insect Cage. Chihiro nodded to herself in a satisfied manner and prepared to climb back down..... However, she froze in place after looking below.

“This is bad... Tsugami-kun, we have a problem.”

Chihiro said that with an overly nervous expression, and Kazaya frowned while wondering what was wrong.

“It looks like I’m not good with heights. I can’t climb down!”

Chihiro stated that so boldly that it seemed strangely dignified.

“.....Do you need help?”

“Yes please, if you don’t mind!”

Kazaya faced the tree, climbed up deftly like he had done this many times before, and extended his hand towards Chihiro. However, Chihiro just looked at him and didn’t do anything else.

“Yeah... I feel like I’ll fall if I move, so that’s not happening!”

“Eeeeh...I mean, what other choice do we have?”

“Umm... I feel bad for asking, but can you carry me down?”

“Eh!? Wait, are you really okay with that!?”

Kazaya was flustered by this unexpected development, and Chihiro gave a small nod. She looked just like she always did on the surface, but her shoulders were trembling slightly. It looked like she really was quite scared.

“.....Excuse me.”

After clearing his throat, Kazaya muttered a quick apology as he put his hand around her waist. As soon as he did that, Chihiro hugged him close and clung to him.

“T-Take it slow, okay? Climb down slowly. Umm, I mean really slowly! Nothing good ever happens in life when you rush things!”

“I don’t see what life choices have to do with tree climbing, but sure.”

Kazaya slowly climbed back down to the surface. However, he felt uneasy as he could feel the warmth of her body all the way down. As soon as they reached solid ground, Chihiro moved away from him and placed her hand on her chest.

“So you have a fear of heights? Please leave things like this to me from next time.”

“Eh? Ah, yes. That’s right. Thank you.”

Seeing her sigh, Kazaya thought that she must have been really scared. However, Chihiro placed her hands on her cheeks that were flushed red.

“.....A-Although it was a crisis, I can’t believe I asked a man, and one younger than me to boot, to carry me. I feel so embarrassed.”

“E-Ehh!? Isn’t it a little late for that!?”

“W-What about it? I was really scared and desperate back then, you know!?”

“That’s certainly true, but you have hugged me in the past as well...”

“I did that unconsciously, so it doesn’t count! What happened earlier was a deliberate request from me! T-That makes it different!”

“I never expected that you would react that way, Senpai. It’s making me feel strange as well.....”

Remembering what happened earlier, Kazaya turned restless. As a result, the two of them became incapable of looking each other in the eye.

“Umm... I-It’s not that I disliked it or anything, though. I didn’t mind doing that because it was you, Tsugami-kun.... Ah! I don’t mean it that way, though....

Umm, w-what kind of situation is this!?”

“I-I don’t know! Anyways, how about we put this topic on hold for now?”

“T-That’s right! That’s a good idea let’s do that that’s what we should do let’s do that right away!”

Chihiro spoke unnaturally quickly, said “Let’s go!”, and started walking.

“.....Still, when I climbed up, I got a good view of this island from up high. That was a great sight.”

Chihiro finally relaxed her expression and looked up at the sky. She was probably recalling the scenery that she had seen earlier.

“As I thought, this world really is the best.”

As if to prove that those words that came from the depths of her heart were the truth—

It appeared that Chihiro really enjoyed going on adventures in Grimveria as she would rush out of school the moment the classes ended, take out her Teleportation Stone, and fly off to the other world.

Kazaya also took the initiative to spend time with her there as he enjoyed watching Chihiro’s antics that were the complete opposite of the cold and intense personality she displayed at the school.

However, a slight problem started to occur after they started spending time together.

“Ah, I’m hungry. Let’s eat.”

“Yeah, I’m starving. My stomach is growling. In short, I have the tummyrumbles.”

It was lunchtime. While listening to the usual banter between Maesaki and Ayukawa, Kazaya considered going to the school store to buy some bread, but...

“Excuse me.”

The classroom door opened, and Chihiro appeared. She walked towards Kazaya while ignoring his classmates who were frozen in place, and placed a rectangular parcel wrapped in pink cloth in front of him.

“Tsugami-kun, I made a bento for you. Let’s eat together.”

“Eehh!? Mikoto-senpai made a bento for Kazaya!?”

Ayukawa raised a shocked cry after looking between him and Chihiro several times. His other classmates also started to raise a fuss.

“.....Is there a problem?”

However, they instantly stopped talking when Chihiro turned an icy glare upon them.

“T-Thank you for the bento... Sorry to make you go to the trouble.”

Kazaya thanked Chihiro while being intensely aware of the fact that all of his classmates were staring at him.

“That’s alright. Where should we eat? Here?”

“Umm, eating here is a bit... How about the rooftop?”

Hearing Kazaya’s reply, Chihiro glanced at Ayukawa. However, she immediately looked back at him.

“That’s fine with me. I’ll go on ahead.”

She turned around and boldly walked out of the classroom.

“.....Oi! Tsugami! What the heck just happened!?”

Maesaki grabbed Kazaya by the collar and shook him violently.

“Mikoto-senpai! The school beauty! Our Goddess! She made a bento for you!? I knew it, the two of you have some sort of special relationship after all, huh!?”

“N-No, I mean.... Umm....”

The two of them certainly had a special relationship, but it was probably different from the kind of relationship that his classmates had in mind. He thought about saying that, but he realized that it would just make the situation more complicated and hence elected to remain silent.

“I want a clear answer, Tsugami! You denied it last time, but the two of you are actually going out, right!?”

“No, we’re not really....”

“It’s fine! I’m almost dying from jealousy, but you’re still my best friend! So I’ll support you! I’ll cheer you on with all my strength! Isn’t that right, everyone!?”

When Maesaki shouted out that question to the class, all his classmates starting with Ayukawa raised voices of assent.

“That’s right! Considering that it is that Mikoto-senpai, my feelings of admiration for your achievement are stronger than jealousy! You’ve achieved something that is even more impossible than causing the heavens to fall!”

The other female students nodded in response to Ayukawa’s statement.

“That’s right. I hope your relationship lasts for a long time. I’ll be cheering you on as well.”

“Still, I’m curious about how their relationship got started. How do you think it started?”

“Ah, that’s right. Which one of you confessed your love first? You? Or Senpai?”

Kazaya faltered in the face of the undisguised curiosity from his classmates.

“L-Like I said, the two of us are not going out or anything...”

“Come on, there’s no need to be shy. Did you confess to her directly? Or over the phone? Or did you send her a message?”

“This is Mikoto-senpai we’re talking about, so maybe it was an old-fashioned handwritten love letter!?”

“Ah, that sounds likely. It fits her image perfectly.”

“I so badly want to read that letter now!!”

Kazaya left the classroom after sneaking away from Maesaki and Ayukawa who were getting excited on their own. He felt that he would even spill the secret of Grimveria if he stayed there for any longer.

“Ah! Tsugami, where are you going? I’ll support your love, so tell us everything!”

Kazaya ignored Maesaki’s voice that came from behind him and started to

run.

He ran up the stairs and opened the door that led to the rooftop.

There were a number of students eating lunch on the rooftop, but there was an unnaturally empty area on the far side. Chihiro was sitting on a bench over there. Everyone wondered what she was doing there, but no one dared to approach her.

However, Chihiro herself was sitting with her eyes down, as if lost in thought.

“Umm, Senpai. Is something wrong?”

Hearing Kazaya’s question, Chihiro looked up at him and gently massaged her forehead with her fingers.

“Ah, Tsugami-kun... No, I was just thinking that I made a mess of things once again.”

“Made a mess of things?”

Chihiro patted the spot on the bench beside her, so Kazaya nodded and sat down. A number of people stared in their direction with shocked expressions, but they looked away when Kazaya looked in their direction. Perhaps they just wanted to avoid inciting Chihiro’s wrath. However, that was very convenient as it allowed the two of them to talk with a degree of privacy.

“I’m talking about what happened in your classroom earlier. I just wanted to ask an ordinary question, but it made everyone go silent. I’m sure I must have had a scary expression on my face once again. I can’t believe I intimidated my juniors like that....”

“.....No, I don’t think they were affected that much.”

“Really? Are you sure?”

Kazaya nodded in response to Chihiro’s desperate question that she whispered in a low voice. Everyone was more interested in the relationship between the two of them, after all. They probably didn’t have the time to be scared.

“Thank goodness.... That’s a relief.”

Seeing Chihiro surreptitiously pat her chest in relief, Kazaya's expression relaxed a little. In his eyes, Chihiro, whose attitude was the exact opposite of what the people around her assumed, looked quite happy.

"What is it? I was actually worried, so that's only natural, right?"

Chihiro pouted a little while making sure that the people around them would not be able to see her expression. Seeing that, Kazaya apologized to her.

".....Still, I hope I didn't interrupt anything earlier?"

"Interrupt? What do you mean?"

"I mean, there was a girl sitting beside you, right? I just thought that if you were going out with her, you might have wanted to eat lunch with her instead."

Chihiro's expression did not change as she said that, which was in line with her usual appearance at school. However, she did appear to be avoiding his gaze, although it wasn't apparent unless he paid close attention.

"If you are forcing yourself to spend time with me, you don't need to worry about it. There's still some time left, so you can go back to your classroom."

"Ah, are you talking about Ayukawa? No, that's okay. We're not going out or anything. We're just friends."

"R-Really?But it looked like the two of you were quite close."

Chihiro looked at him with a narrow gaze. For some reason, Kazaya felt like a man who was being cross-examined after being caught red-handed while having an affair.

"The two of you looked so close that I actually hesitated quite a bit to enter the classroom."

"L-Like I said, we're friends. But we definitely don't have that kind of relationship! That's the truth, please believe me!"

Even Kazaya did not understand why he was saying something that sounded suspiciously like an excuse.

However, after staring at him silently for a while, Chihiro's expression finally relaxed slightly.

“I see. It wasn’t like I was going to do anything even if the two of you were actually going out... So you’re not going out with her, right?”

Chihiro let out a sigh after saying that. Was it just his imagination, or did she look a little relieved?

“That’s right, here’s your bento. I made it myself, though, so I can’t guarantee that it will taste good.”

“Thank you.... But putting Ayukawa aside for now, please don’t do things like that in the future, Senpai. Every time you come to our class, I get bombarded with questions from my classmates.”

“What kind of questions?”

“No, that’s not... In any case. If you’re okay with it, can you tell me your mail address? We can use messages to get in touch when we have something that we need to talk about in private.”

“That’s not possible. I’m not allowed to store any contacts on my phone apart from my father and mother.”

Just how strict was her upbringing? Kazaya was understandably thrown for a loop.

“Eh, you’re not even allowed to have the contact details of friends?”

“That’s right. My phone is checked every day. I had to agree to that condition before I was allowed to attend this school.”

“What do you mean?”

“To tell you the truth, I was originally slated to attend a private school that is run by one of my father’s acquaintances, but I forced my parents to allow me to attend this school instead.”

Seeing Kazaya’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion, Chihiro began to explain in more detail.

“That place was one of those so-called ‘Rich-girl schools’. All of the girls who went to that school were in the same situation as me. Although that’s not really a bad thing... I felt suffocated for some reason. I put up with it until middle school, but I felt that I would never find a place where I could relax if I

continued to stay under my father's thumb even in high school. That is why I rebelled against my parents a little for the first time in my life. I insisted that I wanted to attend this high school that was close to my home and had absolutely no connections to my father. It took some time to convince my father, but in the end, my mother said that being too strict was not a good thing and took my side."

".....So that's what happened."

"They started monitoring my private life more intensely in exchange, so from my father's perspective, perhaps this was exactly what he wanted..... Sorry, this must all seem tedious to you."

Chihiro muttered that as though she was mocking herself and closed her eyes.

"No, I'm glad I got to know more about you, Senpai."

When Kazaya replied with his honest opinion, Chihiro gave a wan smile.

"Thank you. I hope you like the bento."

".....I'm still shocked by how different you are in the other world, Senpai. Until recently I felt that the version of you over there was unnatural, but I've started to feel that the way you are right now is strange."

"Leave me alone. You're going to make me drop my mask if you keep commenting on that."

Chihiro whispered to him while blushing faintly.

"Apart from the time when it's just the two of us, this is how I need to be. I hope you can get used to it quickly."

"If that's how it is.... I understand."

".....? What are you smiling about?"

"Eh!? Ah, it's nothing!"

Kazaya hurriedly fixed his expression. The expression "just the two of us" had made him unexpectedly happy.

Opening the lid of the bento box, he saw a variety of colorful ingredients. Tamagoyaki without a hint of charring, potato salad, gleaming sausages, miso-

preserved fish, and spinach dressed with sesame seeds. The rice had a large pickled plum in it. It was the ideal bento.

“Thanks for the food.... It’s delicious!”

The bento looked like it was cooked at home, but it tasted like it was made by a professional. The fact that his mother was not really good at cooking only served to heighten the difference. He was hooked from the very first bite and finished off the bento in record speed.

“.....Haah. That was great.”

“You didn’t have to be in such a hurry to eat it.”

Chihiro spoke in a tone that was equal parts amazed and pleased.

“Senpai, I had no idea that you were so good at cooking. I had the impression that people from families like yours would have servants to do all the housework and not do anything for themselves.”

“That is usually how it is, but in my case, my mother comes from a family that owns a high-scale traditional Japanese restaurant, and she loves to cook. She usually cooks something on the rare occasions when my father had a day off, so I learned from her. I like delicious things as well, so I wanted to learn how to make them for myself.”

“I see.... Still, I never expected that I would one day eat a bento prepared by you, Senpai. I won’t be surprised if I die tomorrow.”

He seriously thought that.

“Stop being so dramatic. You’re always helping me out in Grimveria, after all. Like when we visited Island #3 the other day, I would have failed if not for your help.”

“Ah, are you talking about the 『Invisible Lizard』?”

Invisible Lizard was a demonic beast that could hide by blending in with its surroundings, and Chihiro had been attacked by it from behind. It would attack relentlessly and avoid being attacked in turn by disappearing, making it a truly annoying opponent to deal with. Chihiro’s Protective Barrier gauge had been whittled down steadily by it.

“I was impressed by how you were able to detect it from the sound of the plants rustling and the slight amount of dust raised by its footsteps, Tsugami-kun.”

“It’s just a matter of experience. I accepted jobs to fight against it several times in the past, after all.”

“Jobs... that reminds me, the two people we met back then said the same thing as well. Don’t Visitors just travel to islands to collect supplies and kill demonic beasts?”

“That is what we do for the most part, but there are times when people in the town make a personal request to acquire a certain item or defeat a particular opponent. That’s what I meant when I called it a job. Oh, and there are times when the goddess makes requests as well.”

“The goddess?”

“Yes. I think it is better to experience that for yourself, so let’s shelve that topic for now.”

Chihiro nodded in agreement and changed the topic.

“By the way, Tsugami-kun. It’s really helpful for me that you visit Grimveria along with me every day, but are you making sure to take care of the other things in your life as well?”

“Other things?”

“I’m talking about studying. Exams start next week, right? Your grades will drop if you don’t revise properly.”

“Ugh....”

Kazaya let out a groan. The thing that he had almost forgotten, or rather, the thing that he had tried his best to forget, was once again brought to the surface.

“Haa... Then again, I don’t really like to study. Although I don’t get bored of games no matter how many times I play them.”

“That’s because you don’t know the correct way to study. Studying is the same as defeating demonic beasts and traveling to islands. As long as you know the proper method, it is not so hard to do.... Hmm.”

Chihiro nodded to herself as if she decided on something.

“Okay, how about this? I will teach you. I have already completed my revision for my exams, so helping out a first-year student like you with your studies shouldn’t cause any problems.”

“Eh, you’re going to teach me, Senpai!? Where were you planning on doing that?”

“We can’t use the library because talking will disturb the other people there. We can’t use my house either because my father would throw a fit if he finds out... How about your house?”

“What!? Y-You want to come over to my house, Senpai!?”

“Would that be a problem?”

“Of course not!!”

He stood up without realizing it. Of course, it was not a problem. It was not a problem, but his heart rate had increased quite a bit.

“I see. In that case, I will be coming over to your house. I’ll wait for you at the gate after school.”

“U-Understood!”

Kazaya fixed his posture and replied in a shrill voice, causing Chihiro to look at him strangely.

(To think I would get the chance to study with Mikoto-senpai!)

It was an unexpected stroke of good fortune. If his life were a romantic adventure game, this would be the so-called 『raised flag』 situation that would lead to unlocking the romance route for a particular character.

“Thank you very much!”

Kazaya bowed his head and thanked her from the bottom of his heart.

○

Chihiro said that she needed to prepare, so she went back to her own house after Kazaya gave her his home address. Kazaya’s parents were both employed, and since he was an only child, he had the house to himself during the day on

weekdays.

The silent and empty house usually gave him a slight sense of loneliness, but for today, the fact that the house was empty was actually a blessing.

“Excuse me.”

Once Chihiro arrived, she took her shoes off and stepped inside, and then turned around, knelt on the floor, and arranged her shoes properly. That action showed that she was an extremely well brought up girl. Kazaya felt slightly ashamed that he had just kicked his shoes off and left them lying around carelessly, so he copied her actions and arranged his shoes properly as well.

Since Kazaya’s room was on the second floor, they went upstairs.

(.....Hang on, when did I last clean my room?)

He seemed to remember cleaning his room last week, but he might be mistaken. It would be bad if that was the case.

“Senpai, please wait here for a little while. I’m just going to tidy up a bit.”

After Chihiro accepted, he opened the door to his room and quickly went inside.

As he had feared, the room was an absolute mess, with manga, his portable game console, the game media, and even the clothes he had taken off that morning scattered haphazardly around the room. No, it might have still been fine if that was all there was to it. However, there were also several risque gravure idol photo albums lying around open, with the scantily clad women clearly visible.

(There’s no way I can let Senpai see something like this.)

Kazaya threw his schoolbag in a corner and started cleaning up.

After he hurriedly finished tidying up, the room was clean and completely different from how it had looked just a few minutes ago.

“You can come in now, Senpai.”

After he called out to her, Chihiro opened the door. However, Kazaya’s eyes widened in shock after seeing her appearance.

She was wearing a form-fitting suit and a pair of silver-rimmed glasses, with her hair tied back.

“W-What’s with that look, Senpai? Actually, when did you change into that!?”

“Fufu.... when you were cleaning your room. For today, I am a female teacher. I’m going to be very strict! In return, if you are able to endure my lessons, I’ll give you a present, okay?”

“A p-present....!?”

A present from a female teacher. Those words had such an alluring ring to them. Kazaya’s mind started to fill up with sparkling delusions.

“By the way, what exactly is the present....?”

“Fufu, don’t be hasty. If I’m not mistaken, it is something that you want the most.”

“That means... Don’t tell me...!”

The present was Chihiro herself? As Kazaya’s heart continued to fill with anticipation, Chihiro replied to his question.

“A bag of assorted candy.”

“.....I see.”

His excitement took a nosedive all of a sudden.

“Huh!? Why did you get depressed all of a sudden!? Boys like things like candy, right!?”

Chihiro put her hand into the bag that she had brought along and pulled out a large plastic bag filled with candy.

“Well, sure, I like candy but.... Actually, just forget it. Please come in....”

After Kazaya invited her inside, Chihiro stepped into his room with an expression indicating that she was still confused about the earlier conversation.

“Oh, your room is actually quite clean. I had imagined that boys’ rooms would be more disordered.”

Kazaya answered her while placing a couple of floor cushions near the table in

front of the television.

“No, that’s just a stereotype.”



Kazaya decided to pretend that what took place earlier had never happened.

“I see. So—where are the dirty magazines!?”

However, Chihiro’s next question was so unexpected that it threw Kazaya for a loop.

“I-I don’t have anything like that!!”

“Even though you are a teenage boy? It would be strange if you didn’t have any! The boys in my class talk about things like that all the time! You don’t have to hide them, are they under the bed?”

“I d-definitely don’t have anything like that! I’m not a pervert!”

“Or maybe—they’re behind the dresser?”

“Uwaah!!”

Kazaya let out a strange sound. She had guessed it accurately. When he was cleaning up in a hurry earlier, he had stashed the gravure albums there.

“Looks like I hit the bull’s eye! Let me see!”

“N-N-No, there’s really nothing back there! Please stop, Senpai!”

As Chihiro dashed toward the dresser, Kazaya grabbed her out of desperation to hold her back. She looked at him silently for a little while.

“.....Okay then, I’ll just take your word for it.”

Chihiro said that in a suggestive tone and smiled, and moved her line of sight to the bookcase.

“Wow, you really have a lot of manga! Would you mind if I took a look?”

“Not at all, go ahead.”

Hearing Kazaya’s reply, Chihiro pulled out a manga volume and started to read it.

Kazaya waited patiently in the beginning because he thought she was just taking a quick look, but she continued to stand there without moving even after ten minutes.

“.....Senpai? Weren’t you supposed to help me study today?”

“Hmm? Did we make any plans like that?”

“Yes, we did. Please don’t forget things so quickly just because you’re absorbed in reading manga!”

Chihiro reluctantly closed the book after hearing what Kazaya said. Her expression was filled with regret.

“Right then, let’s start studying.”

Seeing Chihiro sit down at the table, Kazaya also sat down at the opposite side.

“Ah, that won’t do, Tsugami-kun. Why are you sitting so far away? It’ll be hard to teach you if you don’t sit next to me. It’ll be hard for me to read your notebook and textbook as well. Come over here!”

“Eh?”

Kazaya froze after hearing what Chihiro said.

“What, don’t you want to sit next to me? I take a bath every day so I don’t smell bad or anything.”

“I wasn’t thinking that at all..... Fine. Excuse me.”

Kazaya steeled his resolve and moved to sit down next to Chihiro. While he was sitting down, his hand accidentally brushed against hers and he unconsciously let out a yelp.

“W-What’s wrong? Did you see a cockroach or something?”

“N-No, it’s nothing....”

Kazaya cleared his throat and took out his pencil case, textbook, and notebook from his bag.

“By the way, I’m pretty bad at Japanese, Math, English, Social Studies, and Science. Oh, and I hate P.E as well.”

“You just went through the entire list of subjects.”

“Well, that’s one way to look at it.”

“That’s the only way to look at it!”

Chihiro sighed and pushed her hair back using her fingers. Seeing that mature gesture, Kazaya became even more nervous.

“Okay, so which of those subjects are you really bad at? Let’s focus on those for today.”

“In that case... I guess it would be Math and English.”

Chihiro spoke after Kazaya nodded and opened his textbook and notebook.

“Math is easy enough if you remember the formulas. After that, you just need to plug in the numbers.”

“Remembering them is the hard part, though.”

“You don’t remember them after seeing them once? Umm, why can’t you remember them? I mean, it’s only normal to remember something like that, isn’t it? Why do you think you have trouble remembering them?”

“I-I’m sorry! My brain is a piece of junk! I can’t remember them because my brain is worthless!”

Kazaya apologized because she kept interrogating him without pause, and Chihiro smiled.

“I’m just kidding. I’ll teach you how to remember them.”

After that, Chihiro started teaching him. She covered not only mathematical formulas, but even how to understand and solve word problems, and as for English, she taught him efficient ways to remember new words and how to read and answer comprehension questions.

Chihiro was surprisingly good at teaching. Compared to the lessons at school that entered his head through one ear and left through the other, Chihiro’s lessons slowly built up a foundation in his mind. He even started to wonder why he had found it so difficult to understand those things before as he grasped the method to solve those problems one after the other.

“...And that’s how you do it. Next, try translating this English paragraph into Japanese..... Okay, that’s good. Ah, but... ”

Kazaya looked up when Chihiro stopped speaking, only to see her leaning closer to him. The next instant, he felt something soft pressing against his arm.

“This word here is wrong. You need to use the present continuous tense.”

“R-Right, my mistake. I’m s-sorry.”

Even as he replied to her, his mind was filled with one word in particular.

(Her boobs are touching me, her boobs are touching me, her boobs are touching me, Senpai’s boobs, Senpai’s boobs, Senpai’s boobs!)

That was a bad situation. His sense of reason was slowly but surely being whittled away.

(Senpai’s oppai... even if you shorten it, it’s still Senpai....)

He even started to come up with utterly useless discoveries like that.

(Still, Senpai’s boobs are pretty big... I never noticed because she’s pretty thin, but maybe she’s an E cup? No, they’re probably even bigger.....)

“Tsugami-kun, what’s wrong? Are you paying attention?”

“Eh? Ah, yes! It’s ‘F’, right!?”

The moment Chihiro’s words broke through his reverie, Kazaya said the first thing that came to his mind.

“No, it’s a ‘G’.”

“‘G’!? It’s that big? That’s incredible!”

“What do you mean, big? This letter over here should be a ‘G’ instead of an ‘F’.”

Chihiro was pointing at a particular English sentence.

“.....Ah, you’re talking about the alphabet.”

“We are studying English, after all. What else could it be?”

“No, you’re absolutely right. Hahaha, it’s a ‘G’ and not an ‘F’. I have no idea what I was talking about.”

At that instant—Chihiro appeared to realize something. She moved away from him and cleared her throat.

“I-I’m sorry. I was too close, wasn’t I?”

“Eh!? Ah, no, please don’t worry about it.”

In fact, Kazaya felt regretful that he could not experience that feeling for a little longer.

“.....Tsugami-kun, you’re such a pervert.”

Perhaps his regret had shown on his face. Chihiro was looking at him and blushing.

“W-What are you talking about!? I have no idea what gave you that impression! I wasn’t thinking about chests or boobs at all, okay!?”

He panicked and tried to cover it up, but he only managed to make it even worse.

“S-Seriously.... Focus on studying!”

Chihiro stretched out her hand delivered a light blow to the top of his head with her fist. However, Kazaya felt that in some way, this was also something to be thankful for.

“Right!”

Despite feeling his cheeks grow warmer, Kazaya forcefully shouted to regain his concentration.

After that, Kazaya was tutored by Chihiro for another one and a half hours, and finally, their study session came to a close.

“Well, that should do it for today. Let’s work on a different subject tomorrow.”

“Understood. Thank you so much! It was really easy to understand!”

“That’s great. Even so, you can’t go to Grimveria until the tests are done.”

“Eeh!?”

Kazaya let out a cry of grief and Chihiro shook her head at him.

“I know that world is a lot of fun, but a student’s main duty is to study. You need to first finish your work properly, and then you can spend the remaining time as you like. You know that you will be the one in trouble if your grades go down, right?”

“.....Are you going to stop going there as well, Senpai?”

“Eh!? Ah, umm, of course!”

Not only did she avoid his gaze, but even her voice turned shrill.

“Ah, you were planning to go by yourself! That’s not fair!”

“W-What’s wrong with just going for a little while!? I’ve been keeping up with my studies, after all!”

“But... I was looking forward to going there together with you....”

When Kazaya said that and hung his head, Chihiro stared at him intently.

“.....Y-You were really looking forward to going together with me that much? I’m still not as strong as you, though, so I thought I was just holding you back....”

“That doesn’t matter to me at all.”

Kazaya said that while frowning.

“Ever since I heard about your situation with your family, I started to have a lot of fun watching you enjoy that world to the fullest. The way you looked when you were frolicking around after being freed from your restraints was so cute... oops.”

Kazaya unconsciously said more than he had intended. He hurriedly stopped talking.

“O-Oh.... I see.”

Chihiro looked downwards and scratched her cheek. Even her ears were bright red like the color of ripe apples.

“Since you feel so strongly on the subject, I suppose I’ll resist the temptation of going as well. Umm, I feel the same way... I like going on adventures with you, Tsugami-kun. I would rather wait until the tests are over so that we can have a celebration in Grimveria.”

“Eh, R-Really!?”

Kazaya straightened his body in surprise, and Chihiro gave a small nod.

“I initially planned on going there even though the tests were right around the

corner because I wanted to catch up to you quickly and fight by your side... But it's fine now."

"Thank you so much, Senpai!"

Seeing Kazaya smiling, Chihiro's expression relaxed into a smile as well. After that, she looked up at the clock on the wall.

"Ah, it's already this late. I should leave soon."

She started to stand up, but suddenly stopped before rising all the way.

".....Oh, my. Is that a video game?"

She was probably talking about the game console that had been tucked away under the television stand.

"Yes. I was finally able to buy it recently with the money I earned from working part time at a relative's store. It's the latest model. You can even connect to the internet and play with other people online. Do you want to give it a try?"

".....I'm quite interested in trying, but I don't have much time left until my curfew."

Chihiro stood up fully while showing a regretful expression.

"Looks like you have it rough as well, Senpai. You can't read manga or play games, after all.... How about going to a place that has a lot of shops that sell things like those and secretly buying something? I could show you around when you have a day off."

"But even if I buy those things, I have nowhere to keep them."

"I'd be happy to keep them here for you."

".....No, I can't do that! It would just cause trouble for you, Tsugami-kun!"

Even though Kazaya told her that it wouldn't be a problem, Chihiro stubbornly refused.

"It would be good if I could rent a storehouse or something, but I'm sure my father would find out if I did something like that. It would be so convenient to have a secret hideout."

“A secret hideout, huh....”

“Of course, there’s no chance that something so convenient would exist. Please forget about it. Well then, goodbye for now.”

Kazaya spoke after Chihiro gave a short bow and was just about to leave the room.

“.....No, such a place does exist, Senpai. I can prepare a spot like that. A secret hideout for just the two of us.”

Chihiro’s eyes reflected her confusion. She silently urged him to explain what he meant.

“I was actually looking forward to it because I’m close to completing it.”

Kazaya looked at Chihiro and smiled.

“Please look forward to completing the tests, Senpai. After that, we can go to Grimveria.”

○

Thanks to Chihiro’s help, Kazaya’s midterm exams ended up going extremely well.

Although it would still take a while for the results to be announced, Kazaya felt that he had performed better than he had ever done before.

After filling in the answer sheet for the last exam and turning it in, Kazaya felt like he had been freed at last and cheerfully traveled to Grimveria for the first time in several days. Of course, Chihiro also went along with him.

“Senpai, look out! Above you!”

“Waah!?”

Chihiro looked up when Kazaya warned her, let out a yell, and raised her arm to protect herself. At the same time, an intense sound rang out a few centimeters above her head.

A bat-like creature with its wings spread wide was using its drill-shaped beak to continuously attack Chihiro’s Protective Barrier. It was a type of demonic beast called a 『Hole Bat』.

Chihiro raised her bow and fired an arrow at it, but the Hole Bat just flapped its wings and elegantly evaded her attack. However, Kazaya had anticipated that.

“Creature of darkness, prepare thyself! Ye who restrains for all of eternity, appear in my hand—Snakebite King!”

Kazaya grabbed the sword that appeared in mid air. The blade was long and narrow, and the sword had no guard; instead, the hilt transitioned directly into the blade.

When Kazaya shook the sword vigorously, the blade warped as if it was made of rubber and suddenly started to stretch out. The blade wrapped itself around the Hole Bat in the blink of an eye and brought it crashing to the ground.

The Hole Bat let out a single cry, but soon slumped down and stopped moving.

“That weapon is amazing!”

As Kazaya was sucking the demonic beast into his Insect Cage, Chihiro said that in an interested tone.

“It’s a demonic sword that can extend and contract at will, and it can be used like a whip. Although there are other ways to use it as well.”

Kazaya put away his Insect Cage while replying to Chihiro and started walking.

“For example, maybe you could put the tip of the sword in the mouth of a sleeping enemy, walk far away while stretching the sword, and then suddenly let go of the handle. The handle will snap back and smack the enemy in the face, and it’ll be like, “Guaah!”, right, Tsugami-kun?”

“Why would I do that, it sounds like something out of an old variety show.....”

“Well, maybe you could stretch it out like a goal tape in a running race, and when the runners think that they are just about to beat the record, you can shoot them back to the start line!”

“No, that idea goes beyond the level of a practical joke!”

Kazaya and Chihiro were currently at a place that was known as Island #5.

After arriving at Grimveria, the two of them had visited the Spring Bell Inn, only to learn from the owner that someone had left a job for Kazaya. The job was to bring back a certain flower that could only be obtained on Island #5.

Island #5 had very little vegetation, and most of it was wastelands. Due to that, even the demonic beast from earlier primarily ate the soil to survive, despite looking like a bat. The environment was just that harsh.

“Do flowers really grow in a place like this?”

Kazaya found their objective before he could answer Chihiro’s question.

A structure built from blocks of stone appeared before them.

It was not very big, but it was quite old and clearly man-made.

“Yeah, this looks like a good spot.”

Saying that, Kazaya ducked through the entrance. At the end of a long hallway, he found a large room. On the far side, there was an altar that was in ruins just like the walls and pillars surrounding it. There was a window above the altar, but it did not admit much light into the room.

“So these are... ruins of some sort? Still, it’s quite strange. The people of Grimveria don’t travel to the islands, right? So where did this building come from?”

“According to the stories I’ve heard from people here, in ancient times, the people of Grimveria used to be aggressive and had a strong appetite for adventure, so they used to live in places apart from the Central Continent as well. These must be the remains from that time.”

“Oh, I see. So how did they end up the way they are now?”

“No idea... That was a very long time ago, so apparently there aren’t many records of that time remaining. In my opinion, something big must have taken place. Something so big that the goddess herself had to intervene.”

At that moment, Kazaya fixed his sight at a certain location. He saw a box decorated with delicate ornaments that was lying on the ground.

“Oh my, that’s quite strange. It looks like the treasure chest in a picture book that a girl from my class used to read in elementary school. I wonder what’s

inside!”

Her curiosity piqued, Chihiro approached the box.

“Ah, hang on! Stop, Senpai! You can’t just approach things so casually!”

Kazaya panicked and tried to stop her, but Chihiro had already crouched in front of the chest.

“There’s usually something grand in boxes like this, like gold coins or a treasure map, right? Let’s see....”

As she stretched her hand out towards the box, Kazaya hurriedly shouted from behind her.

“Senpai, get away from there!”

“Eh?”

It happened the instant after Chihiro turned back towards him and made an inquiring sound.

The treasure box opened by itself—Or rather, it bared its 『fangs』, and tried to bite Chihiro’s arm off with the irregularly spaced teeth that lined its rim.

However, Chihiro’s Protective Barrier prevented that from happening, and the treasure box retreated while letting out a strange wail.

Looking closely, Chihiro could see that there were tentacle-like protuberances beneath the box, and it seemed to be using those as legs.

Chihiro panicked and ran back towards Kazaya.

“W-What is that disgusting thing!? If not for my Protective Barrier, I would have lost an arm!!”

“It’s a demonic beast, called a 『Fake Treasure』. They live in ruins like these and attack people who try to touch them. This is what I was looking for.”

“I see. I was careless.”

Chihiro clenched her fist tightly. It looked like she was really upset. Looking at her, the Fake Treasure once again opened its lid. It opened and slammed the lid shut several times, making a loud banging sound each time.

“What is it doing?”

“It looks like it is laughing, Senpai. At you.”

Chihiro suddenly fell silent and stared at the enemy through narrowed eyes.

Kazaya unconsciously gulped after sensing that cold gaze that rivalled the frost of mid-winter.

“.....Tsugami-kun. Prevent that box from moving. This instant.”

“Eh? It’s okay, I can take care of it without doing that—”

“Hurry up! Do as you’re told!”

“Y-Yes!”

Taking that shockwave-like voice head on, Kazaya immediately acquiesced and summoned the demonic sword 『Cavern King』.

Kazaya gripped the hilt of the sword and stuck the blade into the ground. The next instant, a large hole appeared in the ground directly below the Fake Treasure, causing it to fall down into the hole where it started to shake frantically.

“That’s good. Here I go—Uryaaaaaaaaaaa!”

Chihiro charged the energy of her Celestial Bow and fired it out all at once.

The gigantic arrow hit the immobilized Fake Treasure head on. It was blown away by the impact, and eventually fell back to the ground without moving.

“Y-You did it, Senpai!”

“Not yet! Something of this level is not enough to satisfy me! Die!”

Chihiro once again charged an arrow with energy and fired it.

The Fake Treasure was once again sent flying, and it crashed into a wall.

“It’s still not enough! Not yet! Not yet! Not yet! Not yet! Not yet!”

“Eh, hang on—”

Three, four, five, six, seven.

“Not yet! Not yet! Not yet—Take thiiiiiiis!”

Eight, nine, ten.

“W-Wait, Senpai! That’s enough! I’m starting to pity it a little!”

Kazaya pinned Chihiro’s arms behind her back. The Fake Treasure had already stopped moving a long time ago.

“What are you talking about, Tsugami-kun!? There is no need to show mercy towards a demonic beast. I will eliminate every single one of them. That is the mission that has been given to us Visitors, and it is our duty to see that through....!”

“Scary! You’re scaring me, okay!? Your personality is changing again! Senpai! That’s enough, please stop!”

After Kazaya pleaded with all his might, Chihiro finally lowered her bow.

“.....Senpai, by any chance, were you actually pissed off for real?”

“Not really.”

Despite saying that, her face was red and her eyebrows were slanted. It was obvious that she was angry.

“If you shoot it any more, the box will disintegrate. You defeated the demonic beast, so let’s just leave it at that.”

Kazaya walked up to the battered Fake Treasure, lifted it up, inverted it, and shook it a number of times until something fell out from inside. Kazaya picked it up and showed it to Chihiro.

It was a strange plant with a flower that had red, green, and blue petals.

“Commonly known as a 『Treasure Flower』. It’s a rare flower that can only be found inside this type of demonic beast.”

“How did that flower bloom inside the demonic beast?”

Kazaya let out a breath of relief after seeing that Chihiro had once again regained her calm, and answered her.

“Accurately speaking, the flower doesn’t bloom inside the demonic beast. The flower is actually a part of its body. It uses the flower to attract things like insects so that it can eat them.”

“Oh? So it’s like an insectivorous plant. Is it edible?”

Chihiro asked that while staring at the colorful flower.

“No way.”

“Then it’s worthless.”

“What’s with that extreme way of judging the worth of something!? I’ve heard that it is used to make high-quality dyes, so cloth merchants and artists are always looking for it. In any case, with this, the job is complete.”

After putting the flower inside his clothes, Kazaya stored Fake Treasure’s body in his Insect Cage.

“Demonic beasts are really mysterious, aren’t they? They have other sources of food, and yet they still attack people.”

“Now that you mention it, it is quite strange. I wonder if there is some reason for that.”

Kazaya tilted his head in confusion, and then left the ruins along with Chihiro.

“In any case—With the reward from this job, I think I might have finally reached my goal.”

“Goal?”

Kazaya grinned at Chihiro who was looking at him with a confused expression.

“I told you, didn’t I? That I would prepare a 『secret hideout』. Let’s go buy it—Our very own home.”

○

After the two of them returned to Reancos, they handed the flower over to the person who had requested the job and received the payment. After that, they headed out into the town once again.

“Buying a house... Can you really do that? We’re not even from this world.”

Chihiro spoke while furrowing her eyebrows.

“There’s a special rule in place for Visitors. Of course, it costs a fair bit of money.”

“Is that okay? You’re still a high school student.”

“It’s true that I have no real savings to speak of in our world, but over here, I have received quite a lot of compensation for working on jobs.”

The shop Kazaya was walking towards had a picture of a house of the signboard. It was a real-estate agency.

As soon as they entered, they were greeted by a man with a large, protruding stomach. His name was Bran, and he was the owner of the shop.

“Hello there, Kazaya-san. Is something the matter?”

“No, I’m here regarding the property you told me about. I was thinking about buying it.”

“Really!? That’s wonderful. Still, why the sudden change of heart? You said that you don’t need a house here because you don’t stay here for very long, didn’t you?”

“Well, the circumstances have changed a little.”

Hearing Kazaya say that, Bran looked at Chihiro who was standing behind him and nodded as if he understood.

“So you’re getting married to this lady and establishing a household? She is certainly very pretty. I’m jealous.”

It looked like there had been a colossal misunderstanding of some sort. Kazaya waved his hand and denied it. However...

“Thank you for always looking out for my darling!”

He panicked upon seeing Chihiro getting carried away and smiling at the shop owner.

“S-Senpai! Please stop adding fuel to the fire!”

“Fufu, what a sudden rank up from being seen as your lover....!”

Chihiro said that without a trace of hesitation. The scary part was that he had no idea how serious she was.

“I don’t really understand, but I’ll take out the carriage so please get in.”

Bran left the shop while staring at them curiously.

Stepping outside, they found a large carriage waiting for them. Kazaya and Chihiro entered the carriage on the driver's prompting. Before long, the carriage started to move while swaying slightly.

"Wow, this is the first time I've ridden in a carriage since coming to this world! It's like something out of a movie!"

"Although the ride isn't nearly as comfortable as the movies would lead you to believe."

The road they were currently traveling on was paved, but the path would turn rough once they reached the outskirts of the town and the carriage would start to lurch as if it was affected by a series of small earthquakes. At worst, it could even cause motion sickness.

"Eeh. But it's a carriage, you know? A real carriage! Something like that is a minor inconvenience!"

"Senpai, you're going to feel sick later on if you move around so much."

Kazaya warned Chihiro who was bouncing around on her seat, but it appeared that she was in full-throttle excitement mode and his words did not reach her.

"What are you talking about? A chance like this doesn't come around very often, so I have to enjoy it to the fullest!"

Saying that, Chihiro proceeded to cavort about inside the carriage like a child—but once the carriage started to lurch about less than ten minutes later, she suddenly turned meek.

"Umm, Senpai? What's wrong?"

Looking at Chihiro, Kazaya saw that she had one hand over her mouth and she was edging closer to the window.

"I feel sick...."

As predicted, she had been hit with motion sickness. Kazaya rubbed her back.

"See, this is why I warned you to sit still. You're older than me, so please be more prudent."

“S-Sorry.... I was just having so much fun...”

Chihiro asked for the carriage to be stopped for a little while and quickly got better. After she recovered, they started moving again.

“Phew. I was in trouble for a second there. Even though it’s just a carriage, I can’t let my guard down.”

“That’s right, Senpai. You need fix your frivolous attitude a little.”

“W-Why are acting all calm and mature all of a sudden!”

“At the very least, I believe that I was being more mature than you were a short while ago, Senpai....”

Hearing him respond calmly, Chihiro’s cheeks turned red and she cleared her throat,

“A-Anyway, about this idea of yours to buy a house... Do many Visitors do that?”

“Not really. It depends on the person, but there are a few who feel that life is easier here and so they buy a house and turn it into a holiday villa of sorts.”

“That’s right. And that’s why I take the time to meet famous Visitors and make them an offer.”

Bran, who was sitting next to the driver, said that.

The carriage eventually left the town behind and they continued on a path that headed into a hilly area.

After enduring an uncomfortable ride on the bad road that made the two of them feel like they were going to bite their own tongues if they weren’t careful, they finally arrived at their destination.

After Kazaya and Chihiro alighted from the carriage, they started walking behind Bran who took the lead.

They walked through the woods for about five minutes. A short while later, a wooden house came into view. It looked like the sort of building that would be called a bungalow back on Earth.

“What do you think? It’s a little far from the town, but that makes it peaceful.

It's on a fairly big plot of land, so there's plenty of room."

At Bran's urging, Kazaya and Chihiro walked into the house.

Just as Bran had said, there was a lot of floor space inside.

There were wooden chairs and a table finished to a glossy shine placed in the living room, and there was a kitchen on the other side of the room. To their right was a fireplace with a rug spread out in front of it. According to Bran, it was a great spot to sit and talk.

There were lamps placed all around the house, and they illuminated the rooms with a soft light.

"This is wonderful. It's like a house from northern Europe."

Chihiro stated her impression while looking around the house.

"Bran-san, what about the thing you mentioned last time?"

"Ah, it's this way."

After Kazaya asked, Bran showed him to a different room. After heading deeper into the house, they saw a bedroom with a bed inside, and another door next to the bedroom. Upon opening that door, a thick cloud of steam leaked out.

They saw a dressing room inside, and a bath made from stone that was filled with hot water.

"There are hot springs nearby, you see. I heard that Japanese people like Kazaya-san like their baths, so I arranged for hot water to be piped here."

"Amazing! We can actually enjoy hot springs in this other world!?"

Chihiro was gazing at the bath area with a great deal of interest.

"What do you think, Kazaya-san? The price includes the furniture, bedding, and the bath. You won't find such a good deal anywhere else."

The price stated by Bran was certainly quite cheap, considering the quality of the house, but it was still a price that would have overwhelmed any ordinary high school student. Despite that...

"I'll take it. I'll inform the bank about the payment, so please collect the

money there.”

Kazaya made the decision without any hesitation. Bran’s face lit up with delight.

“Thank you for the purchase! Really, this is very good news. Once word gets out that the Lightning-quick wielder of the Demonic Sword bought a house from me, my shop will become a lot more famous!

Bran slapped his large belly and laughed heartily.

“Thank you for taking the time to show us around. Well then, shall we go back, Senpai?”

After Kazaya called out to her, Chihiro nodded while looking a little hesitant for some reason, and followed him out.

They once again got into the carriage and returned to Reancos using the same road they had used to get there.

“Well then, I’ll take my leave here. If you have any questions about the house, don’t hesitate to ask!”

Bran waved his hand and walked away.

“Isn’t it great Senpai? The house looked a lot better than I had expected.”

“.....You’re right.”

Kazaya thought that Chihiro would be happy, but her reply was unexpectedly lacklustre.

“What’s wrong? Was there a problem with the house?”

“No, there wasn’t any problem, but... Tsugami-kun, was that really okay? You bought that house for my sake, didn’t you? Just because I said that I didn’t have a place to keep manga or games even I decided to buy them....”

“Well, yes, that’s true. I thought that you could just store them in that house.”

“I feel really guilty. I forced you to do something so unreasonable because of my selfishness.”

“No, it wasn’t really unreasonable or anything. It’s not like I blew my entire savings to buy it.”

In this world, there was limited use for the wealth attained by exploring islands or completing quests. Most Visitors used the money to buy delicious food or rare curiosities, but Kazaya didn't have much interest in such things. He just purely enjoyed the experience of going on adventures in Grimveria.

For that reason, he had stored nearly all of his money at a bank in Reancos that was exclusive to Visitors.

As for the purchase he had just made, it was just a case of finally finding a use for that wealth. He had nearly depleted his bank account to do so, but since that money was just sitting there and collecting dust, he was of the opinion that it was better for it to be back in circulation.

"Besides, if this lets you enjoy all those things that you never had the chance to enjoy until now, that would make me a lot happier, Senpai."

Chihiro blinked in surprise, but her expression quickly changed into one of happiness and she gave him a large smile.

"Tsugami-kun... Thank you. I really appreciate it!"

She took his hand held it between her own hands.

"N-No, it's not a big deal. This is about the only thing I could do to help, after all."

"That's not true. Still, I'm very grateful."

"O-Okay. Umm... Since we bought the house, how about we go out somewhere this weekend?"

"Sure, that sounds great. This Saturday should be fine. I get one day of complete freedom every month. My father is going abroad on a business trip tomorrow, and my mother supports my freedom to a certain extent."

"Sounds good. So, where should we meet up? In front of the train station?"

Chihiro agreed and clapped his shoulder.

"I'm really looking forward to it, Tsugami-kun!"

"Y-yes. Me too, Senpai."

After he replied, Kazaya suddenly realized something.

(Hang on... Did I just make plans to go on a date with Senpai!?)

The next instant, his heart started to beat wildly.

○

That Saturday. Kazaya's exam results turned out to be excellent, and with his parents' praise still fresh in his mind, he was able to go out to have fun with his head held high.

The plaza in front of the train station where the water fountain was located was packed with people and very lively, probably because it was a holiday. He also saw a lot of couples. He would have burned with jealousy at that sight in the past, but he was a different man today.

(I mean, I've got a date with that Mikoto-senpai....!)

The way he was now, he felt that he could earnestly pray for the good fortune of all lovers.

Before long, Kazaya heard the low sound of a running engine. When he turned to look for the source, a black car stopped in front of him. It was a luxury car from a brand that even he knew about, despite the fact that he didn't have much interest in such things.

The car door opened, and someone appeared from inside. It was a lady wearing an obviously high-quality kimono. Her features were so perfect that she could be mistaken for an actress.

"Tsugami Kazaya-san?"

".....Eh? Ah, yes, that's me."

Seeing as she knew his name, she was probably a friend of his mother's or something. Still, even if that was the case, what business could she possibly have with her friend's son?

"It's nice to meet you. I am Chihiro's mother."

For a few seconds, Kazaya was unable to process the phrase "Chihiro's mother". However, the moment he understood what it meant, he received an impact like getting struck by lightning.

“S-Senpai’s mother?”

“Yes. My name is Mikoto Satomi. Thank you for always looking after my daughter.”

As the lady bowed her head in a dignified manner, Chihiro appeared from behind her. She was wearing a dress with a floral pattern. However, the expression on her face puzzled Kazaya. She seemed vaguely uneasy.

“I’ve heard about you from my daughter. I came here today to meet you.”

“Ah. I see. Eh, umm, it’s a pleasure to meet you! Senpai has been looking out for me in many ways!”

After hearing the lady say that, Kazaya replied in a hurry and bowed so forcefully that it wouldn’t be surprising if he broke his back.

“Not at all. My daughter is quite inexperienced in the ways of the world, so I hope you can look out for her from here on as well.”

“Y-Yes! Really, Senpai has been an absolute blast! Really!”

Kazaya was so confused that he didn’t even know what he was saying anymore.

“Ah, Mom, isn’t this good enough? Look, Tsugami-kun looks like he’s troubled as well.”

Unable to just keep watching in silence, Chihiro spoke to her mother. However, Satomi shook her head.

“Wait for a little while longer. I need to discuss something with Tsugami-san. Would you mind walking with me over there?”

Satomi pointed in a certain direction, and Kazaya hurriedly nodded and followed her. His style of walking was very unnatural, perhaps due to his muscles becoming stiff from nervousness.

“Thank you, and sorry for asking this of you so suddenly. It’s not a pleasant feeling to have me, her mother, show up all of a sudden like this, right?”

“Oh, not at all.”

Kazaya replied that he didn’t have a problem with it, while wondering just

what on earth she wanted to talk to him about. In addition, they had even walked some distance away so that Chihiro would not hear them.

(M-Maybe she's here to tell me not to approach her daughter anymore...!?)

Perhaps her strict father had flown into a rage after finding out about him. There was no telling what might happen to Kazaya if he defied him.

(But Senpai is enjoying the carefree time spent in the other world. She is still lacking experience in some areas, so I need to stay by her side and support her. I can't let anyone get in the way of that, even if it is her father.....!)

However, would he really be able to keep protecting Chihiro? If her rich father used some sort of private forces funded by his wealth to threaten Kazaya, would he really be able to keep fighting back? Even he was aware that his thoughts were shallow, but as a high school student, that was pretty much all he could think of.

(No. I will do my best! This is for Senpai's sake!)

Kazaya clenched his fist and started to talk.

"Excuse me! I'm not sure what you wanted to talk about, but Senpai just wants to enjoy her free time a little! She's keeping up with her studies as well! So I think that she deserves at least that much!"

"Eh?"

"E-Even if her father is against it, I feel that it is not okay to restrict your own daughter to such an extent! S-Senpai is not a lifeless object....!"

He said it. He somehow managed to say it. His voice turned a little stiff towards the end, but he actually managed to say it aloud. Kazaya managed to comfort himself with that fact.

Satomi's mouth was half-open as she stared at him like she was looking at some strange creature.

".....Pfft. Hahahaha! Ahahahaha!"

She held her stomach and started laughing, completely at odds with her dignified attire.

“Eeh!? W-What is it?”

“Aah, that was funny. I’m sorry, Tsugami-san. It’s not what you think. That person—Chihiro’s father—has nothing to do with it. My husband is still in the dark about all this, and I’m making sure that he stays that way. You can rest easy. I am on your side, as well as Chihiro’s.”

“.....R-Really?”

“Yes. That person is stubborn, so even I can’t oppose him directly. Even so, I have been working to secure Chihiro’s freedom as much as possible. Even days like today when she has complete freedom are because of me.”

Kazaya felt like he was going to collapse from relief.

“If not for that, there’s no way Chihiro would tell me about you, right? I don’t know the details, but a while ago, she started talking to me about how she was having fun with a junior from school and that it has been a good change of pace for her.”

“I-I see. I’m sorry for speaking so rudely earlier.”

“It’s fine. My husband is certainly keeping Chihiro restrained, after all. I’ve been wanting to do something about it myself, but he very rarely listens to me.... Still, I will definitely do something about it. He has become a little better recently, thanks to all my hard work.”

Kazaya glanced at Chihiro who was still waiting at some distance behind them and thought that it certainly didn’t seem that way. Just how strict had her father been in the past, if this was considered being better?

“The reason why I came along today was to thank you, Tsugami-san.”

“Thank me?”

“Yes. I’m sure you already know, but because of her father’s instructions, Chihiro rarely shows her feelings. Maybe because of that, she has always had trouble making friends. I couldn’t bear to see her going to school like she had already given up on something. She never said anything to me about it, but I knew that she was living her life all alone.”

Satomi glanced at her daughter, and her eyes showed the extent of her

sadness.

“But ever since she met you, she looks like she has been having a lot of fun everyday.”

“.....R-Really?”

“Yes. That’s why I wanted to meet the person who made her feel that way. I feel relieved. I was surprised to find out that it was a boy, but I’m glad that she met a kind person like you, Tsugami-san. I’m sure that your honest personality got through to her.”

“No, I’m nothing special. I didn’t really do anything for her.”

Kazaya waved his hand, thinking that she overestimating him.

“Not at all. I am convinced after seeing how you acted earlier. You are a wonderful person. Once again, I hope you can continue to look out for Chihiro in the future as well.”

“Ah, yes. I would be happy to!”

Kazaya responded energetically. All of a sudden, Satomi leaned close to him and whispered in his ear.

“Even so, the two of you are still in high school, so don’t get too carried away. I ask that you maintain a healthy and pure relationship with her, at least until you are both of age.”

“Huh!? No, Senpai and I are not really—”

“It’s fine, you don’t need to hide it. Well then, I don’t want to get in your way any longer, so I’ll be leaving now.”

Satomi turned around with a smile on her face and went back to sit in the car that was waiting for her.

Before long, the car once again disappeared leaving behind only the echoes of the sound of the engine.

“.....She’s totally has the wrong idea.”

Kazaya felt that having Chihiro’s mother approve of a relationship was not a bad thing, but he just hoped that things did not develop in a strange direction

because of that.

“I-I’m sorry, Tsugami-kun. I accidentally let slip that I was going to meet a junior from school whom I was familiar with, and my mother insisted on coming along to meet you.”

Chihiro came closer to him and bowed her head.

“N-No, it’s fine. She’s a great mother. Besides, she’s a beauty just like you, Senpai.”

“What are you talking about?”

Chihiro let out a long sigh and continued to speak.

“I’m glad that she is worried about me, but her curiosity is so strong that it is troubling. She’s already past forty and yet she’s like a little kid in that regard.”

Kazaya unconsciously fixated in the word “forty”. She certainly didn’t look that old, but considering that she was Chihiro’s mother, it was not at all strange that she had already crossed that age.

“.....It looks like you inherited your mother’s features, Senpai.”

In terms of peerless beauty and a certain ageless quality, they were identical.

“Really? I don’t think the two of us are very similar at all.... More importantly, what did my mother have to say to you?”

“Eh? Ah, it wasn’t really anything important.”

“Really? She winked at me before getting back into the car, you know? My mother only makes that expression when she has found something interesting.”

“Eh.... No, really, it wasn’t anything important.”

“.....”

“Senpai, please stop glaring at me silently. It’s scary.”

“.....Fine.”

Seeing Kazaya looking scared, Chihiro eventually relented and shook her head.

“We lost some time due to an unexpected event, but let’s get going.... But

before that....”

Chihiro turned her back to him and started to rummage around inside a bag that she had brought along.

When she finally turned around, Kazaya saw that she had put on a hat after tying her hair back, and she was wearing sunglasses and a mask to hide her eyes and face.

“Now it’s perfect!”

“Yes, you’re a perfect example of a shady character!”

It was like her whole body was giving off a suspicious aura.

“Why are you wearing all those things?”

“I mean, this is not the other world. There’s not telling who might be watching, right? But you’re taking the time to show me around, so I thought that you might not like me acting like my usual self. So I prepared a disguise.”

“It just looks really strange, so please take them off. How about you at least take off the mask and the sunglasses?”

“.....Really? Won’t people recognize me? They won’t recognize me and upload pictures to the internet or anything, right? I saw it on TV. Your body will catch fire if someone uploads pictures of you to the internet, right?”

“That’s wrong in so many ways! I don’t even know where to start correcting you!”

For the time being, Kazaya assured her that people do not just spontaneously catch fire in real life.

“Even if you are in danger of being recognized, I will do my best to prevent that from happening. Please trust me, Senpai.”

“R-Really? Okay, then. I’ll leave it to you.”

Chihiro took off her sunglasses and mask, and put them away inside her bag.

“By the way, where would you like to go? I’ll accompany you where ever you want to go, Senpai.”

“.....Let’s see. For starters, I want to look at some manga!”

“In that case, there’s a place we can go. It’s not too far away by train.”

Saying that, Kazaya led Chihiro into the train station.

(.....By the way, this is the first time I’ve seen Senpai wearing casual clothes.)

As the he two of them were walking side by side, Kazaya thought that while looking at Chihiro. Since he had only seen her wearing her school uniform or her equipment in Grimveria until now, he felt somewhat strange.

“What’s wrong? Are.... these clothes strange? I’ve never spent time outside with a boy before, so I really didn’t know what else to wear.”

Chihiro spoke with a red face while clutching the hem of her clothes.

“N-No! I t-think you look stupendous!”

“.....Do I really look that fat?”

Chihiro looked a little shocked.

“No! I meant that you look great! You look like a high-class young lady.... Ah! You don’t really like to hear stuff like that that, right!? Umm, let’s see, you look really nice, like a princess or something... you have a refined air but still look like you get along well with commoners.... I can imagine you sitting with a farmer’s daughter on a prairie and eating cookies while chatting... wait, what the hell am I even saying!?”

Kazaya tried to correct himself but only managed to increase the level of confusion. Chihiro stared at him blankly for a for a while and then burst into laughter.

“I’ve noticed it before, but you act strangely every once in a while, Tsugami-kun.”

“I-I’m sorry. But I wasn’t lying when I said that you look really nice in those clothes.”

While Kazaya hung his head thinking that he had made a fool of himself, Chihiro continued speaking.

“Even so.... Thank you. You always try your best when you do something, and I love that part about you.”

“Eeh!?”

Kazaya’s body heated up instantly. Chihiro gave him a strange look, but after she finally realized the meaning of what she had just said, her face turned red.

“I-It’s not like that!! I didn’t mean it that way... I mean, I do love that side of you, but not in that way... ah, seriously! What are you making me say!?”

Chihiro smacked him on the back with all her strength. It certainly hurt, but for some reason Kazaya felt really happy.

They eventually reached the ticketing gates. Kazaya took out his card to pay for the trip.

However, he suddenly heard a loud sound. It was the sound caused by the ticket barrier gate closing to prevent someone from passing through without paying.

“Hmm? But I didn’t try to go through the gate yet...”

As he was saying that, he immediately realized who had caused that to happen. Chihiro was standing still, with the gate blocking her from moving forward.

“Senpai? Did you put the ticket into the machine?”

Or perhaps the machine had failed to read her card. Kazaya asked her that question while considering such alternatives, but Chihiro turned to look at him with a serious expression.

“Ticket? What’s that?”

Kazaya thought she was joking, but apparently Chihiro was completely serious.

“.....I mean, you need a ticket in order to ride the train. You can buy one over there.”

Kazaya pointed at an automatic ticket vending machine that was right next to the ticketing gates.

Chihiro stared at the machine Kazaya was pointing to for a little while, and then pushed her hair back.

“Of course, I already knew that!”

“Please don’t lie.”

“I-It’s not a lie! Umm... That’s right, I was just testing you. I’m glad to see you properly know about such things.”

“Of course I know it. I’m a high school student, after all.”

“.....I see. So this is something people learn when they enter high school.”

Chihiro hung her head. It looked like her pride had been injured for some reason.

Kazaya scratched his cheek for a second, purchased a ticket from the ticket vending machine, and gave it to Chihiro.

“Here you go. Please put this into the slot on the gate.”

When Chihiro did as he said, the ticket was pulled from between Chihiro’s fingers and disappeared into the machine.

“Tsugami-kun, you’re trying to trick me! The machine stole my ticket!”

“No, it did not. Look, it came out on the other side.”

Kazaya pointed to the other side of the gate. Chihiro looked to where he pointed, and was shocked to see the ticket sticking out of the machine on the other side.

“You’ll need it to exit the station once we reach our destination, so please don’t lose it.”

After passing through the ticketing gate, Chihiro collected the ticket and carefully put it inside her purse.

“Senpai, have you never been on a train before?”

Kazaya asked her that once they reached the platform, and Chihiro nodded.

“I’ve always used a car when I had to travel some distance, like I did today.”

“Ah... So what happened before was an important experience for you. You should learn it properly before going home today.”

“Yes! I’ll save this ticket forever as a memento!”

“The machine won’t return the ticket when you exit the ticketing gates at the destination, though.”

Chihiro looked at him. She looked really shocked by what he had just said.

The train arrived at the platform shortly after, and Kazaya boarded it along with Chihiro.

“The interior is surprisingly small and cramped.”

Chihiro was looking around inside the train compartment with a curious expression.

At that moment, Kazaya turned around after feeling someone’s gaze on him. However, he was not entirely sure about that. Most of the men inside the compartment were looking at Chihiro. Considering her beauty, it was only natural.

However, those people did not know the truth. They had no way of knowing that this young lady who looked intellectual and composed actually had an extremely innocent side to her.

“Tsugami-kun, what is this meaning of the symbol on the sticker over there near the corner seat? It looks like a mobile phone. There’s a diagonal bar running through it, does that mean we’re not allowed to use mobile phones in here?”

“It means that using mobile phones here is dangerous and doing that will cause the train to come to an emergency stop.”

“Eh, the train will stop for such a trivial reason...!?”

She was so innocent that she would even instantly believe such a suspicious-sounding lie.

“No, that was a lie.”

He felt his nose get pinched strongly.

“Geez! I’m never going to believe another word you say, Tsugami-kun!”

The train arrived at their destination while Kazaya was scratching his head.

“Why did we come all the way here?”

“There are a number of large bookstores here that sell manga that is difficult to find anywhere else. There are also a bunch of shops that sell games and anime-related merchandise. This place is the so-called otaku district.”

“Ah, I’ve heard of this place before. This is Akihabara, isn’t it?”

“That’s right. Although, technically speaking, Akihabara is not the official name for this otaku district, it is actually the name of one of the stations in Tokyo.”

After passing through the ticketing gates at their destination, they saw the main street in front of them, and there were rows of shops on either side of the street with pictures of beautiful girls or game characters on the billboards.

“Is there any particular manga that you’re looking for?”

“Let’s see, I don’t really know much on the subject, so I’m not sure what to reply....”

“In that case, what genres do you like?”

“Hmm. I don’t really mind it in novel format, but... anything apart from horror should be okay.”

In other words, she did not like horror. Kazaya found that to be a little unexpected.

“Well, I can recommend a number of titles that I like. If you find them interesting, then you can buy them.”

Saying that, Kazaya entered a nearby shop.

“This shop is pretty small, but they have a good selection of titles. They even have titles that you would usually only find at urban centers.”

The small shop interior had a number of large bookshelves crammed inside, and they were all packed with volumes of manga.

“Amazing....! These all all manga!?”

Kazaya slipped in between the customers and stood in front of a bookshelf.

“Ahem. Since you’re not used to reading manga, Senpai, it’s probably a good idea to avoid the ones with complicated layouts for now. These should be a

good place to start.”

Kazaya selected a number of titles that he liked and collected at home, and handed them to Chihiro.

“This isn’t scary, right? Right?”

Chihiro seemed a little too obsessed with making sure of that. However, it was difficult for him to answer her question.

“Umm... That depends on what you find scary, Senpai. There are standard things like ghosts and monsters, but depending on the person, blood splatter and brutal scenes can be classified as being scary as well, right? For example, action manga tend to have a lot of gore, so you need to tell me what kinds of things you find scary, Senpai.”

“Let’s see.... Centipedes, I guess?”

“Centipedes? You mean those bugs with long bodies?”

Chihiro grimaced as though she could not bear to even hear the name of those creatures, and nodded.

“When I was little, I found a centipede in my bed while I was visiting my grandparents from my mother’s side. It was right in front of my face and looked like it was about to bite me, so I was very afraid. I’m still traumatized by that!”

“.....”

“What’s wrong, Tsugami-kun?”

“Aah... No, it’s nothing.”

Kazaya had just been taken aback because Chihiro said something that he would have never expected, considering how boldly she usually carried herself.

“So are centipedes the only things you’re afraid of?”

“Yes. Oh, and I’m not fond of things like ghosts either. I’m fine with blood splatter and the like.”

“I see. In that case, there shouldn’t be any problems with the titles I just picked out.”

“If anything, I’m a fan of things like heads getting lopped off, limbs being torn

off, and wails and screams of despair!”

“I don’t even know what to say to that, I feel like problem is in a different place now.”

Kazaya said that, although he didn’t think it was particularly strange as everyone had their own likes and dislikes.

“So you like things like these, Tsugami-kun? What standards do you go by when choosing something new?”

“Let’s see. There are some that I read in a magazine and found to be interesting, and I also buy the titles that are popular on the internet. Beyond that, it’s just intuition. For example... when I’m walking around bookstores like this, if I look at a book cover and feel something like 『Ah! This is the one!』 then I’ll pick it up. I guess it’s based on the art style or and the overall impression I get when I look at the book.”

“Hmm. In that case, have there been times when you bought a book, only to be disappointed in the contents?”

“Well, sure, but I also enjoy gambling on a book like that with no advance information. It makes me even happier if I happen to find something I like.”

“I see... That’s great. I feel like I’m gazing into the depths of the mysteries surrounding the human psyche.”

It was hardly anything that exaggerated, but since Chihiro seemed to be interested, Kazaya decided not to say anything about it.

“If you’d like, why don’t you give it a try, Senpai? Just pick out something that looks interesting without trying to search for a particular reason.”

“Sure, I’ll try doing that! Give me a minute.”

Chihiro nodded and started walking around inside the store. Kazaya felt glad that she was having fun, and he started looking for some books for himself as well. After about ten minutes, she called out to him.

“Tsugami-kun, I’ve decided.”

“That’s great.... Eeh!?”

Kazaya turned around and was shocked speechless. He couldn't see Chihiro anywhere. Instead, what he saw was a tower of books. He belatedly realized that he couldn't see her because she was hidden behind the large number of books.

"You're going to buy so many, Senpai!?"

"Yes, I carefully chose them!"

Chihiro peeked around the books with a dignified look on her face. Kazaya felt that this was no time for such an expression.

"That quantity doesn't look like you selected them carefully at all! Can you even carry all of them back after buying them?"

".....Oh. I forgot to consider that part."

Chihiro looked regretful as she went to put the books back on the shelves, except for a few.

"This number should be okay, right!?"

Eventually, she came back and showed him a set of around ten books.

"Ah, this should be fine. We can always come back when you feel like buying more."

".....That's right. We can just come back later."

Chihiro seemed to dwell on those words as she carried the books to the billing counter. After completing the purchase, they left the shop.

"I get a certain amount of money as allowance every month, but I've just been saving it since I had no real use for it. I never expected that I would be able to splurge in a place like this."

Chihiro spoke while holding on to the paper bag with the manga. Her voice felt somewhat lively.

"That's great. Oh, let me carry that for you."

"That's fine. It's quite heavy."

"Then I should definitely be the one carrying them. Don't worry about it."

Seeing Kazaya hold out his hand, Chihiro initially hesitated. However, when Kazaya stopped walking and just kept waiting for her, she eventually relented and handed him the bag.

“.....It’s not just the other world. You’re reliable in this world as well, Tsugami-kun.”

When Kazaya was about to carry the bag, Chihiro suddenly grabbed one of the handles. Their fingertips touched, startling Kazaya.

“Let’s carry it together. I can’t let you bear the weight all by yourself.”

“Okay.”

Kazaya nodded and started walking down the road, holding on to the bag along with Chihiro. Kazaya thought that the people who saw them walking like that must think that they were a happy couple, and couldn’t resist smiling.

“Did you see something funny, Tsugami-kun? You’re smiling.”

“Eh!? Ah, no, it’s nothing. More importantly, is there anywhere else you want to go?”

Kazaya hurriedly changed the subject before Chihiro could realize what was on his mind.

“Let’s see... Ah, are there any video game arcades around here?”

“Yes, there are. There’s one nearby that I visit often.”

“I’d like to go there and try my hand at a few games!”

“Sure.”

Kazaya agreed and guided her to a store that he was familiar with.

It was a four-storey building, and every one of those floors was packed with a variety of games.

The first floor had a number of crane game machines lined up with a variety of prizes inside. Chihiro stopped in front of one of those and peeked inside through the glass.

“Is there something that caught your interest?”

Hearing Kazaya speak from behind her, Chihiro pointed at a particular spot. There were a number of cute teddy bears and super deformed manga character plushies inside the machine, among which one particular doll was very eye-catching.

It was a gorilla.

It was a tough-looking gorilla with thick, black fur.

As expected of a game that mostly offered plushies that women would like, this particular doll was also designed to be fairly cute. Despite that, it looked really out of place amongst all the other dolls.

Kazaya thought it might be a character from some anime and tried to look for a name on the doll, but he wasn't able to find anything. The tag that hung from its neck just said 『King of the Forest』. It was a gorilla. Without a doubt, it was just an ordinary gorilla.

“Why is something like that in such a place....”

Kazaya thought that the staff might have put it in there by mistake, but he didn't think that there would be any other crane games that were better suited for that doll. Basically, it was strange that this doll was even available in a place like this.

“That's amazing. I wonder if the staff put it in there as a joke.”

In recent times, it had become fairly easy to quickly upload pictures to the internet using social networking sites. Due to that, there were cases where shops would sometimes arrange for something strange on purpose to allow the customers to do their advertising for them. This gorilla might also be something like that.

“But seriously, putting a gorilla in there is a bit too much. It feels like looking at a middle-aged man who snuck into a girls-only party. Even that gorilla itself must feel like it is in the wrong place.”

Kazaya assumed that Chihiro was pointing at the gorilla to call his attention to it and make him laugh. However...

“.....So cute.”

Chihiro let slip a word that he had not expected at all.

“Don’t you think it’s really cute!? It’s wonderful! The person who made this gorilla must be a genius! There’s no doubt about it, such a genius is born only once every ten—no, every hundred years!”

“Eh, S-Senpai!? You like it that much? Senpai, do you like gorillas!?”

Kazaya unconsciously asked her that, and Chihiro looked at him and replied with an expressionless face.

“Not particularly.”

“No, but weren’t you really interested in that gorilla?”

“This is not a gorilla, it’s a gorilla plushie. Tsugami-kun, even I would not want a real gorilla if they happened to have one at a video game arcade. Although I would find it really curious!”

“Rather than curious, that would be outright strange.”

He could only think of something like that happening if a gorilla happened to run away from the zoo and settled down in a video game arcade.

“But this gorilla is a nice gorilla! It gets cuter the more I look at it. It makes good use of the features of a real gorilla, while exuding a sense of softness and fluffiness that a real gorilla could never achieve! It’s amazing how the manufacturer turned something that is so obviously a gorilla into something that is completely different from a gorilla!”

“Senpai, do you realize how many times you just said the word ‘gorilla’!?”

Kazaya was shocked by the continuous repetition of a word that he had never expected to hear from a beautiful girl like Chihiro.

“.....It’s a good gorilla.”

Chihiro continued to stare at the gorilla plushie. Kazaya found it hard to accept, given the target of her attention, but the enraptured expression that she directed at something she found to be cute was not all that different from that of other girls her age.

“Senpai. If you want it, I can get it for you. This crane can be moved freely, so

it'll be easy to get it."

Kazaya exchanged places with her and stepped in front of the machine, took a hundred yen coin out of his wallet, and inserted it into the machine. He started to move the crane in small increments while paying attention to the angle.

"But it's such a large gorilla."

"There's a trick to it. As long as you pay attention to the item's center of mass, it's actually pretty easy to get what you want... there we go."

When he pressed the button, the crane descended and grabbed the gorilla around the neck and slowly lifted it up. However, this was the important bit. There was always a chance that the item would fall down again before it reached the outlet hatch.

As Kazaya and Chihiro watched with bated breath, the claw slowly traveled to the edge of the housing where the hole was located and dropped the gorilla. With a dull sound, the gorilla dropped into the opening perfectly and they managed to obtain it.

"Alright, I managed to get it. Here you go."

Kazaya picked it up and handed it to Chihiro, who stared at it intently.

After a while, she slowly embraced it and closed her eyes. It was as though she was experiencing the joy with every fiber of her being.

"I'm glad you like it. You can treat that as a present from me."

"Eh, no, I can't do that!"

"It's fine. I got it for just a hundred yen, after all. Just treat it as a memento for the time we spent today."

"R-Really? In that case... Thank you."

Chihiro smiled at him while hugging the gorilla.

After they left the game center and walked for some distance, Chihiro stopped by a general store.

"Is there something you want to buy?"

"Yes. How about buying some things to put in your house in Grimveria? That

house doesn't really have anything apart from furniture, after all."

"Ah, that sounds good. Let's do that."

Kazaya joined Chihiro in selecting and buying a number of accessories and wall decorations. Thinking that it might be nice to have some flowers, they visited a florist and purchased a potted plant as well.

".....By the way, can we really take the manga and other things we bought today to Grimveria?"

Chihiro asked him that while they were taking a break from shopping.



“I can see why you would be concerned about that, but it’s fine.”

If that was not the case, then everything they did today would be pointless.

“Items that you can carry by yourself and the clothes you are wearing will be transported along with you when you go to the other world. Things that are too big—like cars, for example—cannot be transported.”

“It looks like the system is quite flexible in that regard. How about bringing things from the other world over to this world?”

“Yes, the same holds true for that as well. It is possible, but you shouldn’t bring back anything that is really important.”

“I see. That’s great.... Tsugami-kun, is there any place you would like to go next? It can be anything. You go to places like maid cafes all the time, don’t you?”

Chihiro adopted a pose filled with confidence for some reason.

“No, I don’t! Why are you stating that so confidently!?”

“Eh? Don’t all high school boys visit a maid cafe at least once a week!?”

“Where did you hear that!? I’ve suspected it for a while now, but are you sure you’re not being fed false information by some trickster, Senpai!?”

“Hmm... I wonder where I heard it from...”

Kazaya started to worry about her, but Chihiro just said that and lapsed into thought.

“Well, in any case, I don’t really have any place that I want to visit. I decided that I would accompany you where ever you wanted to go today, after all, Senpai.”

“Really? Thank you! In that case, stay with me for just a little while longer.”

Kazaya thought about saying that he would not mind staying by her side forever, but he felt that it would be embarrassing and so he opted to stay silent.

At that instant—a person he did not expect to meet called out to him all of a sudden.

“Oh? It’s Kazaya! Hey there!”

Ayukawa suddenly appeared in front of them, and Kazaya cowered in shock.

“H-Hey. What’s up?”

“Nothing much. I just remembered that a new volume of a manga that I wanted to read was released, so I rushed here to buy it. How about you, Kazaya? Shopping? If you’re free, how about going to get a bite to eat... Huh?”

Ayukawa noticed Chihiro who was standing next to Kazaya before she could complete her sentence.

“Hmmmmmmmm? By any chance, is that you, Mikoto-senpai?”

(...Crap)

Kazaya turned to look at Chihiro and saw that she had a serious look on her face.

“N-No, this person is my older sister.”

“Kazaya, you don’t have any siblings.”

His lie was shot down on the spot. Childhood friends could be such a handful to deal with for exactly this reason.

“S-She’s a cousin. She’s new in town, so I was showing her around....”

“What are you talking about? I wasn’t sure at first because she’s wearing a hat, but she’s definitely Mikoto-senpai..... Oh? Could it be? Are the two of you on a date?”

Ayukawa grinned at him after she arrived at that conclusion.

“T-That is.... Umm...”

“That’s right. We are on a date.”

Kazaya was trying to cover up the issue, but Chihiro declared that before he had a chance to speak.

“H-Hey! Senpai!?”

“Oh!? So the two of you were going out after all!”

Ayukawa looked at Kazaya and Chihiro in turn as though she had discovered something interesting.

“Still, you’re really something else, Kazaya. Even though you already have me.”

Ayukawa came closer and gave him a light dig in the ribs with her elbow.

“Seriously, don’t make jokes like that.”

“Sorry, my bad.”

Ayukawa apologized and bowed her head after seeing Kazaya let out a sigh.

“You are Ayukawa-san, right? It looks like you’ve known Tsugami-kun for a long time.”

Chihiro suddenly spoke up while looking closely at Ayukawa.

Ayukawa initially had a cheerful expression, but she slowly started to break out into a cold sweat when she noticed Chihiro staring at her intently.

“Umm, Kazaya? Senpai is glaring at me with the intensity of a Nioh^[1] statue for some reason.”

“R-Really? I think it’s just your imagination.”

Kazaya secretly agreed with Ayukawa, but he decided to deny it for now.

“It hasn’t been very long since I met Tsugami... No, Kazaya-kun. However, I plan on getting to know him better from now on. It’s nice to meet you.”

Chihiro made sure to call him by his first name and slightly bowed her head.

“I-I see. Sure, I understand. It’s nice to meet you too.... Umm, Kazaya, I should get going.”

Perhaps she felt something that was hard to put into words. Ayakawa said that and quickly walked away.

“Umm, Senpai, what’s wrong? You were acting a little strangely just now.”

Kazaya spoke to her after some time had passed, and Chihiro let out a sigh.

“It’s nothing.... I wonder if that was a little childish of me.”

Chihiro muttered that in low voice while blushing slightly.

“I-It’s not like I felt something after seeing you talk to Ayukawa-san, okay!?”

“Felt something? Like what?”

Kazaya tilted his head in confusion because he had no idea what she was

talking about.

“It’s nothing! Come on, let’s go!”

Chihiro grabbed his hand and practically dragged him along.

After that, Kazaya accompanied Chihiro to many shops where she purchased the things that she wanted.

As evening approached, both of them were weighed down by massive bags.

“Alright! We managed to splendidly complete our shopping! Tsugami-kun, do you still have some time? I’d like to take these over to Grimveria as soon as possible.”

“Sure, I don’t mind. That was the main goal for today, after all.”

The two of them walked into a back alley and held their Teleportation Stones while still carrying the shopping bags.

Their surroundings went dark for a short while, and before long, they appeared in the plaza at Reancos. The items that they had purchased had also safely appeared along with them. The two of them started walking after Kazaya suggested that they find a carriage to take them to the house, when a familiar voice called out to him.

“Ah! Kazaya-san!”

When Kazaya turned around, he saw Nina running towards him.

“Hello, Nina-chan!”

Chihiro called out to her, and Nina shouted in surprise after seeing her..

“Chi-Chihiro-san! Don’t you think you have been spending a little too much time with Kazaya-san these days!?”

“I have?”

“Yes! Kazaya-san used to travel alone to the islands until recently, but now he always goes together with you!”

“Oh, now that you mention it, I suppose that’s true. Is that a problem?”

“Well, not exactly, but...”

Nina glanced surreptitiously at Kazaya.

“Umm, I get that both of you are Visitors, and it’s good that the two of you get along, but how do I put this... Clinging to him all the time is also a problem! That’s right! These are not just my personal feelings on the matter, it’s more like an issue of public decency!”

“I don’t think I’ve been clinging to him or anything. Right, Tsugami-kun?”

“Yeah, I don’t think... we’ve been doing anything like that.”

Kazaya was perplexed when Chihiro suddenly threw the question to him.

“But the two of you are together today as well! Are you going to an island again?”

“No, not today. We were just planning on going over to the house.”

“House?”

Seeing Nina just parrot that word back at him with a questioning look on her face, Kazaya explained what he meant.

“Ah, that’s right. I was planning on telling you when we next met. I bought a house some distance away from the town, and plan on spending some time there.”

“.....Together with Chihiro-san?”

“That’s right. So we bought some books, flowers, and other accessories to decorate the house.”

“Wha—!”

Nina let out a shout and froze in a strange position, standing on the tips of her toes with her hands raised up.

“—Such a thing! That’s not allowed!”

Eventually, Nina recovered as though someone had pressed a reset button and started waving her arms frantically.

“You were planning on spending time there with just the two of you!? And it’s in a secluded place!? What’s more, you were planning to decorate the house with accessories and flowers!? That’s... That’s... I don’t even know what to say!”

Nina ended her tirade without clearly saying what she was thinking about as if she was afraid that saying it aloud would cause it to become official.

“Ah, now that you mention it, it does seem like something n-newlyweds would do.”

However, Chihiro went ahead and said it with a red face.

“Waaaah! You actually said it! Did you do that on purpose!? Are you trying to show off!?”

“I-It’s not like that! I just thought that some people might see us that way, that’s all!”

“Aaaaargh! That’s the confidence of a winner!”

Nina hugged herself and hid behind Kazaya.

“N-Newlyweds? Come on, you’re exaggerating. Hahaha.”

Despite saying that, Kazaya felt that it would actually not be all that bad. It looked like buying a house turned out to be the correct decision, even though he had not done it with that reason in mind.

“A-Anyway! That’s how it is. Sorry, Nina-chan, but the two of us need to go now.”

“Aaaaaaaah”

Nina started to groan after hearing what Chihiro said.

“This is bad. I did think that she was a formidable opponent, but she actually has the ability to surpass me.... Is it okay to leave it like this? No, that’s a bad idea. That’s definitely a bad idea, Nina!”

Nina had been muttering something to herself while looking down, but she suddenly raised her face.

“Okay! Nina will go over to Kazaya-san’s house as well!”

“Eh? What about the shop!?”

“It’s fine! My father has to attend a neighborhood council meeting today, so he was planning to close the shop early! Besides, we don’t have that many customers right now! Please, Kazaya-san! Let Nina come along as well!”

“....I’m fine with that. What about you, Senpai?”

“Eh? Umm... Let’s see, I guess it’s fine? That is, if Nina-chan actually has the courage to come over!”

Chihiro brushed her long hair back and put on a challenging smile for some reason.

“.....What is this feeling? It’s like she is saying ‘bring it on if you dare’. Well, Nina won’t lose to her either!”

Nina said that to encourage herself, and looked at Kazaya.

“In that case, please wait here for a little while. Nina will return to the shop and get permission!”

Kazaya agreed and nodded.

“It won’t take long. Please wait here, don’t leave without Nina!”

After emphasising that point, Nina quickly ran off.

“Senpai, why did you get Nina all fired up like that?”

“Umm, there’s no particular reason... She gets influenced easily, so I just found it interesting. In any case, I would be kind of nervous with just the two of us over there... I accidentally went and said that we were like newlyweds, after all.”

Chihiro spoke that last part in a low voice so that Kazaya would not hear it. Kazaya was looking at Chihiro with a puzzled expression, when someone suddenly called out to him.

“Ah, Kazaya! So you’re here as well!”

Tohru appeared before them all of a sudden and greeted Kazaya in a friendly tone.

“You seem to be carrying a lot of luggage. Are you not planning to go to the islands today?”

Tohru opened his eyes wide in surprise after Kazaya told him about buying a house as well.

“Seriously!? That’s amazing! I’ve been wanting a house of my own as well, but

it's so hard to save up the money! No matter how much money I make, I seem to always spend it on something good! Say, would you mind if I tagged along as well? I'm curious to see what the house looks like!"

"Eh? You want to come over to the house...? Umm... "

When Kazaya turned to look at Chihiro, she let out a small laugh.

"I don't mind. Having a lot of people over might be fun as well."

"Ohh! As expected from Kazaya's girlfriend, you've got a generous personality as well!"

"She's not my girlfriend or anything—"

"Oh, I saw Izumi at a tavern earlier. How about asking her to come along? What do you say!?"

Tohru asked without letting Kazaya finish his sentence.

"Sure, why not? You don't mind, right, Tsugami-kun?"

Kazaya nodded in answer to Chiro's question.

"Alright! In that case, just wait there for a bit!"

Tohru ran off while shouting that.

"As always, he's such an energetic person."

Chihiro said that, partly in praise. Even Kazaya thought that Tohru would not lose to anyone when it came to being vigorous.

Nina returned while they were waiting for Tohru.

"H-Hello. Shall we get going, then?"

She must have been in a real hurry as she ran back. She was completely out of breath.

"Are you okay? Did Bado-san give his permission?"

Nina nodded enthusiastically when Kazaya asked her that to confirm.

He was worried if she was really alright, but since she said it herself, he decided to believe her.

“Thanks for waiting! I brought Izumi along!”

At that time, Tohru returned with impeccable timing. He was carrying Izumi.

“Hey! I told you that I didn’t want to go, right!?”

“Come on, it’ll be fun! Don’t be so shy!”

“That is something Kazaya should say, not you!”

Izumi struggled to break free, but she eventually gave up and sighed.

“Well, I’m curious about Kazaya’s house as well, so I guess I’m willing to go.”

“Killing!? Where!?”

“It’s nothing. Are even your eardrums made out of muscle!?”

“Hahaha. She said my eardrums are made from muscle!”

Izumi smacked Tohru, and he let out a hearty laugh even though he probably didn’t understand what she had just said.

“Ah, Tohru-san and Izumi-san! Are the two of you coming along as well?”

“Hell yeah! Let’s go together, Nina!”

Nina looked surprised to see them there, and Tohru lightly patted her shoulder.

“For starters, let go of me already, you idiot!”

“Ah, sorry, my bad!”

After being scolded by Izumi, Tohru apologized and let go of her. Since he did that without any warning, Izumi was unable to react in time and fell to the ground.

“Ouch! Why youuuuuu....! What were you planning to do if I injure this hand of mine that will someday generate an income worth millions!?”

“Oh? Sorry about that. Just let that slide, yeah? Hahaha!”

“You don’t sound apologetic at all!”

Even though Izumi snapped at him and started kicking him, Tohru was not fazed one bit.

“.....It looks like things have gotten pretty noisy.”

Kazaya could only nod once again when Chihiro said that.

After that, they hailed a stagecoach (which had the same function as a taxi from their world) and traveled to the house together.

“Wow! So this is the house that you purchased, Kazaya-san!? It’s beautiful!”

Nina’s eyes started to sparkle once they arrived at their destination and got down from their carriage.

“Oh? This is a pretty nice place. Wouldn’t expect anything less from you, Kazaya!”

“It pisses me off that I am forced to agree with Tohru, but yeah, I feel the same way.”

Tohru and Izumi gave comments of praise as well, and Kazaya started to feel strangely embarrassed.

They sent the coachman away after asking him to come back in a few hours.

After they entered the house, Chihiro and Kazaya placed the items that they had purchased on the table.

They took out the manga, accessories, and decorations, and started arranging them.

“What is this? A book? It has a really nice drawing on the cover.”

Nina picked up one of the manga volumes and stared at it closely.

“It’s a manga volume. I told you about manga some time ago, didn’t I? It’s a book from my world that has pictures.”

“Ah! So this is what you were talking about!”

Nina started to flip through the pages, but she eventually frowned and let out a groan.

“.....Kazaya-san. I can’t read this.”

“Well, it is written in a language from my world, after all.”

Visitors had the ability to understand the spoken and written language in

Grimveria.

However, the people who lived in this world could not understand written Japanese. That was probably because there was no real need for it.

“Uuuugh. This is so frustrating. Maybe I should just try and read it while inferring the details from the pictures.... ”

Nina alternated between pushing the manga volume away and picking it back up again.

“It’s fine, Nina. Even I couldn’t read katakana until I was in third grade of elementary school. I’m sure you’ll be able to read Japanese in no time!”

“Coming from a person like you who is an exception among exceptions, that’s not comforting at all.”

Tohru tried to cheer Nina up using a strange method, and Izumi glared at him through narrow eyes.

“Tsugami-kun, can I put this here?”

Chihiro called out to Kazaya from the other side of the room. Looking over, he saw that Chihiro wanted to put the gorilla plushie above the fireplace.

“Are you sure you want to put it in such a conspicuous place?”

“If we do that, it’ll be like he is watching over the house. Instead of a guard dog, we’ll have a guard gorilla.”

“Sure, I don’t mind, but calling it that really leaves a powerful impression.....”

Even burglars might lose their nerve and run away after seeing it.

Chihiro looked at the gorilla that was sitting above the fireplace and patted its head while smiling.

“We’re counting on you, Gorilord Banks Giran III.”

“Gorilord Banks Giran III!?”

“Yeah. Gorilord Banks Giran III. That’s his name.”

“You have a pretty good sense for naming things, Chihiro-san.”

“Eh!? You call that good!?”

Izumi looked like she was impressed, which surprised Kazaya.

“...Well, sure, why not? Although I do think that it is a pretty exaggerated name.”

“If it’s too long, we can shorten it to Gori-san.”

“It became a lovable character all of a sudden!”

Seeing that Kazaya found that name to be more acceptable, Chihiro smiled as though she was satisfied and said something to the gorilla plushie.

“Oi, Kazaya. Where do you want to put this ornament?”

“This painting is pretty big, so I’m putting it up over here, okay?”

Tohru and Izumi, who were helping out with setting up the decorations, called out to Kazaya who responded to them appropriately.

“Tsugami-kun, how about placing these flowers in the kitchen?”

Kazaya nodded to Chihiro who asked that question.

“Ah, sure. The flowers will make the place look more elegant.”

After discussing it, the two of them decided to move the flowerpot to the kitchen. However....

“Please wait! Don’t you think the flowers would look better on top of the desk?”

Nina came running and slid to a stop in front of them.

“Take a look at that desk. It’s big, but there’s nothing on top of it. Doesn’t it look barren?”

“Ah, that’s certainly true.”

“But don’t you think it would be nice to have something pretty to look at in the kitchen while doing the dishes?”

“.....That’s true as well.”

“No way! Just imagine this! You look at the desk while eating, and you see flowers! There’s no better way to bring color to your life! Harmony! Tranquility! Therapy!”

Nina stood with her hands on her hips while opposing Chihiro.

“Hoho... How interesting. Are you looking to compete with me, Nina-chan?”

Chihiro smiled fearlessly, and Nina put herself on guard.

“O-Of course. I’ll take you on anytime!”

“That’s good. In that case, how about we do it like this? We can take turns keeping the flowerpot on the desk and in the kitchen for a day each and judge the effect it imparts to the scenery of the room! After that, we can decide which one looks better!”

“I-I see, that sounds fair! Alright, Nina is getting fired up!”

“Or at least, that is what I planned on doing, but I feel like doing that would be a pain, so let’s just put the flowerpot on the desk as Nina-chan suggested!”

Nina, who had been all fired up with her hands in the air, fell flat on her face.

“Senpai, it’s not nice to get someone fired up and then suddenly pull the rug out from underneath them. Look, Nina has no idea to do with all her motivation now.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Are you alright?”

“I’m fine....”

Chihiro asked Nina if she was okay, and Nina replied while still lying flat on the ground. Kazaya accurately guessed that Chihiro had done that on purpose because she wanted to see Nina show such a reaction.

“Chihiro-san is quite the strategist. I’ve learned something useful to put Tohru in a tight spot.”

Izumi grinned and looked at Tohru who was patting Nina’s head while laughing.

“I wonder... Since it’s him, he probably won’t understand it even if you do something like that.”

“Ugh...”

Izumi became silent after Kazaya stated his conjecture.

“Y-You’re right. Ah, seriously, that guy has gone past being dimwitted and is approaching the level of not caring about anything, so it’s such a pain to deal with him! Geez, why does an intellectual person like me have to be with a guy like that!?”

“You know how people say that opposites attract, right? It’s like making up for the things that your partner lacks.”

“There is no area in which I am lacking.”

Izumi declared that to Chihiro.

“.....Your self-confidence is something else.”

Kazaya smiled wryly while thinking to himself that her level of self-confidence was pretty hard to achieve.

“Oh? Oi, Kazaya. What is this?”

At that time, Tohru, who was going through the shopping bags, found a square box that was wrapped with paper and looked over at Kazaya.

“Oh, those are playing cards. I brought along a handheld game console as well for killing the time, but it can’t be used once the battery dies. I thought having a game that doesn’t require electricity might be a good idea.”

Kazaya walked up to Tohru, took the playing cards, and ripped off the wrapping paper.

“That sounds nice. Should we give it a try? There are five of us, so what game can we play?”

“Let’s see. I’m pretty sure Nina has never played card games before, so how about going with something simple like Old Maid?”

Kazaya opened the box and started shuffling the cards while replying to Chihiro.

“Playing cards? Old Maid?”

Nina, who had finally recovered, asked that question with a blank look.

“It’s a game from my world. It’s played with a deck of cards with suits numbered from one to thirteen, and a single card with a picture of a joker on it.

The players take turns picking a single card, and if they have a match, they discard the pair. However, since there is only one joker card, the person who ultimately ends up with that card is the loser.”

“Ah, So it’s like the Renant game, Brunkas.”

Nina said that while looking at the cards.

“That’s right. You can think of it like that.”

Once Chihiro and the others sat down at the table, Kazaya started to deal the cards.

“What’s ‘Renant’?”

“That’s what card games are called in Grimveria. They are a common sight at taverns and the like.”

Izumi answered Chihiro’s question, and Kazaya picked up the explanation in more detail.

“The type and number of cards are different, but the games are more or less the same. Brunkas is pretty similar to Old Maid, except for the rule that you have to shout 『Brunkas!』 before you discard your last pair. If you don’t, not only do you have to take back the cards that you discarded, you also miss a turn, meaning that the game has to go through a full circuit before you get a turn again.”

Apparently the game had been invented by a person called Brunkas, but since it happened so long ago, even the people of Grimveria were not really sure about that. Speaking of which, the name ‘Renant’ came from ‘Renantus’, the name of a demonic beast that had existed since ancient times. However, the beast that was depicted on the cards was imaginary, as no one had actually seen it for themselves.

“Oh? Even though we are from different worlds, it looks like there are parts of our cultures that evolved in the same way.”

Chihiro spoke while looking very interested.

“In that case, how about we play using Grimveria’s rules instead?”

“Are you sure? If you do that, Nina will have an overwhelming advantage.”

“Oh, that sounds like fun.”

Nina sounded like she was full of confidence, and Chihiro replied with a faint smile.

“Hey, I’m good at it too! I’m always the last man standing when I play it with my friends, after all!”

“.....Doesn’t that mean you lose horribly every time?”

Kazaya could not help but retort when Tohru said that in a proud voice with his fist raised high, but Tohru just looked back at him blankly.

“Wait, the person who keeps the joker until the end is not the winner?”

“Hey, Kazaya just explained the rules a minute ago, didn’t you hear him!?”

Izumi held her head and said that.

“I mean, I wouldn’t expect anything less from Souya.”

“He’s a man with great freedom of thought, isn’t he!?”

For some reason, Chihiro took Kazaya’s words in a positive manner.

“No, he’s just a regular idiot. He’s the biggest idiot born on this side of the century.”

Seeing Izumi’s exasperated expression, Tohru scratched his head.

“Aw shucks! You’re making me blush with all that praise!”

“I’m not praising you! How many times do I have to tell you that!?”

“Oh that’s right, you’re always telling me that! Since you want to be an author, you should lose the habit of repeating the same thing over and over, Izumi!”

“Why the heck do I need to receive criticism from someone like youuuuuuu!”

Izumi leaped at Tohru, but he just laughed and fended her off with a single hand.

“Alright, you two. We know that you guys get along well, so can we please get this game started?”

“We don’t get along!”

Kazaya called out to the two of them, and Izumi responded while baring her teeth.

Although it took a while, they finally managed to start the game. They each picked a single card from the deck, and the person with the highest number would start. That person turned out to be Chihiro.

After collecting the cards, splitting the deck into five parts, and giving one to each player, they started the game of Old Maid.

.....However, Kazaya was immediately convinced that the game would not last very long.

“Alright then, I’ll start.”

Chihiro said that, turned towards Nina who was sitting on her left, and pinched one of the cards in Nina’s hand between her thumb and forefinger.

“Ah!?”

Immediately, Nina made a shocked expression.

“.....How about this one?”

“Aaaah!?”

Nina once again made the same expression.

“In that case... I’ll pick this one.”

“Fufufu.”

This time, Nina let out a fearless laugh.

“Just kidding! I’ll pick this one instead.”

Chihiro picked a different card and added it to her own hand. Nina slumped her shoulders with an obviously crestfallen expression.

“In that case, now it’s Nina’s turn to take a card from Izumi-san...”

“Hang on for a second. Nina, do you know what the term ‘poker face’ means?”

When Kazaya asked her that, Nina just stared back at him with a blank expression.

“Poker face?”

“When you’re playing these kinds of games, you’re supposed to prevent yourself from making any expressions that might give the other players a hint about what cards you’re holding.”

“Yes! Nina is very good at that!”

“No you’re not!”

Hearing the immediate denial, Nina frowned suspiciously.

“Eh? But Nina always wins when playing Brunkas at the tavern! Doesn’t that mean Nina’s poker face is working well?”

“.....I think you’re mistaken.”

Kazaya was once again convinced that this world was filled with kind people.

“Hey, Nina. You have the joker, don’t you?”

Hearing Izumi say that, Nina jumped out of her chair.

“Eeh!? How did you figure it out!? Is that one of the powers given to Visitors!?”

“No, that would have been obvious to anyone.”

Kazaya said that with a wry smile.

“Nina-chan, your expression changes a lot depending on which card is picked. If you keep doing that, it will be easy for everyone to guess what card you have and you will end up losing.”

“R-Really!? In that case, Nina will try and keep a poker face from next time!”

After getting advice from Chihiro, Nina nodded and took a card from Izumi. After taking the card, she immediately grinned. She probably picked a card that matched one in her hand.

“Nina. Your expression is changing again.”

“...Wah! Nina understands. Nina will keep a poker face.”

Nina pressed her lips together and showed a tense expression. She probably thought that she was making a poker face. However, to everyone else, it looked

like she was trying to endure the pain of sitting on a pincushion.

“Ah, what’s wrong, Nina? Did your rear get pricked by a pin or something?”

Tohru had apparently been thinking the same thing, and when he asked Nina that question, her face turned bright red.

“N-No! Ugh, it looks like this poker face thing is pretty difficult....”

Nina put her hands on her cheeks and moved them up and down, but she didn’t have much success.

“Well, I guess it’s a start. Kotobuki, it’s your turn next.”

Izumi picked a card from Tohru’s hand and discarded a pair.

After that, Tohru picked a card from Kazaya’s hand, and in the next instant—

“Aah! Goddammit, it’s not the joker!”

“Seriously, learn the damn rules already!!”

“Wait, what?”

Izumi kicked Tohru, but he just looked at her like he had no idea what she was talking about.

“Besides, didn’t we already determine that Nina has the joker!? There’s no way that you would get it!”

“Eh!? Ah, that makes sense! Hahaha! Izumi, you’re pretty smart!”

Seeing Tohru let out a hearty laugh, Izumi pressed her hand against her forehead as though she had a headache.

“Tsugami-kun, it looks like we have a player who doesn’t even know the rules!”

“I have a bad premonition about this....”

Kazaya was perplexed, wondering if Old Maid was actually such a difficult game.

After that, it’s was Kazaya’s turn to pick a card from Chihiro. He glanced surreptitiously at her expression as he did so. However, her expression didn’t change at all. No matter what card he touched, her expression stayed the same.

“A-Amazing...So this is a poker face.... What does Nina have to do to make such an uninterested expression?”

“Well, the fact that I don’t have the joker right now is part of it, but perhaps my daily training is the reason.”

Chihiro looked proud of herself.

“What do you mean, ‘daily training’? Are you taking some sort of special lessons?”

Izumi, who didn’t know about Chihiro’s situation, asked that in a puzzled tone. Well, it was true that Chihiro had been mastering that expression at school everyday. Her poker face might actually be the best in the world.

After Kazaya took one of the cards from Chihiro, he saw that he had a matching card. He discarded the pair.

“A-Alright, I’ll give it a try, Pick a card, Chihiro-san!”

“Hmm... alright then. I’ll pick this one.”

When Chihiro pinched a card between the tips of her fingers, Nina made a strange expression. She twisted her lips, looked diagonally upward, and puffed up her cheeks.

“What the heck? What kind of expression is that?”

When Kazaya asked Nina that, she proudly rubbed her finger below her nose.

“Fufufu. As long as Nina keeps doing that, you won’t be able to guess what Nina is thinking. Incredible, right?”

It was certainly incredible. It was an incredibly stupid expression. Although Kazaya thought that, he decided not to say that aloud.

“It certainly does look incredibly stupid!”

Despite that, Tohru said it anyways with his customary lack of tact, and Izumi yelled at him again.

Beside Kazaya, Chihiro had turned away from the table and her shoulders were shaking. She was probably trying her best to control her laughter.

“.....Well, if you’re okay with that, Nina, I guess it’s fine.”

Kazaya muttered that, despite having mixed feelings about it.

However, it looked like Nina's 『Make a strange face』 plan had paid off, and Chihiro had drawn the joker. That was apparent from the fact that Nina was smiling happily.

“Alright—Nina picks this one!”

Nina picked a card from Izumi and her eyes immediately began to sparkle.

“Yaaaay! A-All the cards have a match! Nina wins!”

Nina raised both her hands and put her cards down on the table.

“Nina wins! Yaaaaay!”

Nina stood up on her chair and started spinning around. She seemed to be really excited.

“Wait, Nina-chan. You’ve forgotten something important!”

Chihiro called out to Nina in a calm voice.

“Eh? Where is the mistake? Nina won the game so brilliantly!”

“Brunkas.”

“.....Eh?”

“You forgot to say ‘Brunkas’! Take those cards back!”

Chihiro picked up the cards that Nina had just put down and heartlessly pushed them back into Nina's hands.

“Wha..... Wait..... Nooooooooooooooooooooo!”

Nina jumped down from the chair and started rolling around on the ground.

“But Nina won! This can’t be happening!!”

“Fuhahahaha! You’re too naive, Nina-chan! You need to stay focused until the very last instant of the game! Judging by how you got so excited when you were about to win, you’ve still got a lot to learn! You are far from becoming the Old Maid Emperor!”

Chihiro stood on her own chair and declared that in a haughty tone.

“...This is the first time I’ve seen people go through such a range of emotions over a game of Old Maid.”

Kazaya also considered asking what an Old Maid Emperor was, but he had a premonition that the explanation would take a while and hence decided not to ask.

“Well, Nina is always trying very hard. I think that’s a good thing.”

“Really? You agree, right!? So that means that Nina wins this round!”

Nina happily stood up after hearing what Izumi said.

“Nope, rules are rules! You need to take those cards back and lose a turn, Nina!”

“Fufufu, fall into the depths of despair, Nina-chaaaaan!”

Noooooo! Izumi-san and Chihiro-san are being mean!

Nina continued rolling around on the ground all the way upto the kitchen.

“Come back here, Nina.”

Kazaya called out to her, and after some time, Nina came back to the table while sniffing.

“What’s with the rule that you absolutely have to say ‘Brunkas’... It makes no sense!”

“It’s a rule that the people from your world came up with, though.”

After Kazaya pointed that out, Nina puffed up her cheeks and once again returned to her seat.

“It’s fine, Nina will show that she can still recover! Nina is a strong girl!”

Nina clenched her fists like she was fired up... However, in the end, Chihiro was the winner. Kazaya took second place. Izumi came third, and Tohru took fourth place. Nina ended up in the last position.

Nina fell flat on the table and started babbling unintelligibly. On the other hand, Chihiro wore a big smile on her face. She actually went all out against a younger child.

“Still, despite the penalty, I can’t believe she actually fell from first place to last place....”

Kazaya had a complicated expression on his face as he considered how bad her luck had been.

“More importantly, I can’t believe that someone actually lost to Tohru.”

Izumi felt more moved than astounded as she said that.

“Still, it was a heated battle, wasn’t it!? I’ve never drawn the joker that many times in single game before! I was so close to victory, but it got taken away from me again at the last minute.”

“And on the other hand, Souya didn’t manage to learn the rules at all throughout the game!”

Kazaya was amazed that Tohru had managed to come in at fourth place despite that. At the same time, Kazaya felt a little sorry for Nina who had lost to someone like him.

“Bad luck, Nina-chan. Do you want to play another round?”

“Yes!”

When Chihiro asked Nina that, she raised her head and replied.

—After that, they played ten games, and Nina came in at last place in every single one of those games.

“I-Impossible.... For the undefeated Nina to end up like this.... Aaahhhhh!”

Nina stood up from her chair, retreated unsteadily until her back hit the wall, and slid down to the ground.

“.....Maybe we should have gone a little easy on her.”

Kazaya felt sorry for Nina who was making an expression like a boxer who got beaten one-sidedly.

“You’re right. I think we went too far. I had no idea that she would be this weak.”

Chihiro, who had maintained her win streak, said that.

“You’re right. Maybe I should lose to her on purpose next time....”

As Kazaya muttered that to himself, he heard a soft sound. It was coming from Nina. After moving closer to her, he realized that it was the sound of her breathing in her sleep.

“Huh? She’s asleep.”

“I’ve heard of people crying from frustration, but this is the first time I’ve seen someone go to sleep due to frustration. She looks so cute when she’s asleep.”

After looking at her Nina curiously, Chihiro supported her shoulders.

“Let’s move her to the bedroom. Tsugami-kun, give me a hand.”

“Ah, right. Let’s do that.”

The two of them moved Nina to the bed while taking care not to wake her up.

Once they covered her with a blanket, she mumbled something in her sleep and snuggled in peacefully. Kazaya and Chihiro looked at each other and smiled.

Leaving behind Chihiro, who said that she wanted to look at Nina’s sleeping face for a little while longer, Kazaya returned to the living room.

“Nina fell asleep? Well, the carriage is here, so I guess we should get coming now.”

“You mean ‘get going’. That’s right, we shouldn’t overstay our visit.”

Kazaya reached the living room just as Tohru and Izumi stood up from their chairs.

“Oh, you’re leaving? Sorry, I couldn’t do much to welcome you.”

“Don’t worry about it.... By the way, Kazaya, mind if I ask you something? Aren’t you going to try and conquer the uncharted islands?”

Kazaya looked puzzled when Izumi asked him that question all of a sudden.

“Hmm? Yeah, I have no plans to do that as of now. Why?”

“I see. Actually, I was planning on giving it a shot sometime soon. I was thinking about what time would be the best to go, so I just wondered what your plans were.”

“Oh, I was planning on doing that as well! What a coincidence, Izumi!”

Tohru said that while looking happy, and Izumi deliberately showed an annoyed expression.

“Hey, you’re not hanging around me on purpose, are you? I’ll have to make a police complaint.”

“Oi, you’re the one who always ends up at the places where I want to go, Izumi! We must share a bond!”

“I wish I could cut that bond right now!”

Chihiro returned to the living room while the two of them were arguing, and with Chihiro and Kazaya seeing them off, the two of them pulled out their Teleportation Stones and vanished.

With just Kazaya and Chihiro left in the room, the house became silent all of a sudden.

“Ah. After all that, I’m definitely a little tired.”

Chihiro sat down in a chair and let out a sigh.

“We walked around a lot today, after all. Good work keeping up.”

“Yeah. Thank you for keeping me company, Tsugami-kun.... I’m tired, but I had a lot of fun.”

Chihiro put her hand on her chest and smiled faintly.

“This is probably the first time I’ve played around so much. I feel refreshed.”

“Really? That’s great.”

“Yeah... Still, I can’t help but feel like I forced you to accompany me for my own sake. Are you sure that was okay, Tsugami-kun?”

Seeing Chihiro say that in an apologetic tone, Kazaya immediately shook his head.

“I don’t mind at all, as long as you had fun, Senpai.”

“But I feel like I’ve done nothing but cause trouble for you...”

“It’s fine, really. I had fun as well. And besides...”

After hesitating a little, Kazaya said what was really on his mind.

“As I said earlier... I really like seeing you being true to yourself, Senpai. I got to see you engrossed in selecting manga, happily choosing accessories to buy for the house, and having fun with everyone today, so if anything, I feel like I should be the one thanking you instead.”

After he said that, Chihiro stared dazedly at him with her mouth half open.

“.....Hmm? What’s wrong?”

Kazaya looked confused by her reaction, and Chihiro just looked downwards without saying anything.

By the time she timidly glanced up at him, even her ears had gone bright red.

“I thought the same thing last time as well, but how can you say things like that without any trace of hesitation!?”

“Eh? Ah, did I say something bad!?”

As Kazaya started to panic, Chihiro looked away and avoided his gaze.

“Not really.... Not really, but.... Seriously, you’re such an idiot.”

The words that she uttered towards the end in a low voice made Kazaya’s chest hurt. This must be what was meant by feeling like your heart was placed in a wrestler’s hold.

“.....Ah, t-that’s right! This house has a bath, right?”

Chihiro suddenly stood up and turned around. It felt like she was trying to change the subject because she didn’t want him to notice something.

“Eh? Ah, that’s right. This place does have a bath. I’m pretty sure that the people from the real estate agency prepared things like bath towels as well, although it would be too much to ask for shampoo and the like. I wonder if there is any soap...”

“In that case, I’ll just take a quick dip. See you later.”

Chihiro set off towards the bathroom at a half run.

Left behind by himself, Kazaya looked at her leave with a slightly dazed expression.

(The way she reacted... I wonder if that was just her being shy?)

However, he felt that she also seemed shaken for some reason. She had shown a similar reaction back when she was helping him with his studies as well.

(Don't tell me, does Senpai actually have feelings for me.... No way. There's no way that could happen. Don't get too carried away.)

There was no way that things would go so conveniently for him. The other person was Chihiro, after all.

(T-That's right. I was just imagining things. I spoke too frankly and made her feel embarrassed, it must be something like that. Senpai probably just sees me as a junior from school and a friend....)

Kazaya took several deep breaths and tried his best to calm himself.

“—Tsugami-kun.”

However, he got a fright when he suddenly heard that voice calling out to him.

When he hurriedly looked in the direction that the voice came from, he saw that Chihiro was peeking out through the bathroom door.

“There aren't any bath towels in here....”

“A-Ah. I guess they are in the cabinet over here.”

Kazaya went into the kitchen, opened the cabinet, and found a pile of towels there. Kazaya returned with a towel and handed it to Chihiro, who received it. In that instant, Kazaya caught a glimpse of her bewitching white skin and the fragrance of soap made its way into his nose.

“.....What are you looking at?”

“S-Sorry!”

Chihiro looked at him through narrowed eyes, and Kazaya hurriedly apologized and turned around.

After the door closed behind him, Kazaya muttered to himself.

“No, but still, you can't blame a guy for getting the wrong idea.....”

As a teenage boy going through puberty, it was not unreasonable for him to wish for a dreamy development in his relationship with the Senpai that he looked up to.



Translation Notes:

[1] [Nioh Statue](#). [↑](#)

Chapter 3 – The Desired Playstyle

One week after Kazaya had gone shopping with Chihiro.

As usual, Kazaya was once again exploring islands on Grimveria.

Chihiro, who accompanied him, had also become very proficient at moving around and using her weapon.

“Tsugami-kun! Dodge to your right!”

Kazaya jumped aside as instructed, and an arrow of light sped past him. There were several demonic beasts called 『Gran Goblins』 in front of them. These creatures were also known as a higher-rank version of the Class Goblins with differently colored skin.

The arrow pierced one of the goblins and exploded. The fragments of the arrow rained down on the surrounding goblins, and they collapsed at the same time.

This was a new ability of Chihiro’s Divine Works. While each individual attack was not very powerful, it had the ability to scatter and damage all enemies within a limited area.

“Well done, Senpai! You beat them all by yourself!”

Kazaya praised Chihiro, and she gave him a thumbs-up.

“I can’t fall behind either... Take this, foul demonic beast. Fear my power and begone!”

Kazaya faced off against a different monster that had appeared in the surroundings along with the Gran Goblins and swung a demonic sword imbued with the power of the wind. The wind pressure sliced the demonic beast to ribbons and brought it down.

“.....An unworthy opponent.”

There were eight enemies in total including the Grand Goblins, so Kazaya and Chihiro each stored four of them in their Insect Cages. Immediately after, a light-hearted sound rang out. It was the notification for a level-up.

However, it was not for Chihiro, but for Kazaya.

“Congratulations, Tsugami-kun. Your stylish playstyle is also in top form!”

“Thank you, but I’d appreciate it if you didn’t pay too much attention to that....”

He just couldn’t seem to shake that habit. Kazaya turned his face away in embarrassment.

“.....Alright then, how about we take a break?”

Kazaya and Chihiro were currently on Island #4. It was an island with many rocky hills, making it a prime location for mining stone that was used to build houses and pave roads. It was also a good place to find metal ore that could be used to make tools and armor for Visitors.

They had come over to this island because a carpenter had left a job request for Kazaya at Bado’s inn. Kazaya had accepted that request while also considering that it would be good training for Chihiro.

“Here you go.”

Kazaya accepted what Chihiro offered him. It was a packed meal that they had purchased at the Spring Bell Inn for eating during their trip.

The meal consisted of large portions of chicken, several varieties of cheese, and slices of a vegetable similar to cucumbers that served as an accent, sandwiched between thick slices of bread. This was one of Bado’s specialties, and it was apparently quite popular in Grimveria.

He sat down on a nearby boulder and bit into the sandwich. The taste of chicken seasoned with pepper spread throughout his mouth, and he found it to be very delicious.

“Hmm...”

Kazaya made a sound while looking at his level display screen as he ate his lunch.

“What’s the matter, Tsugami-kun?”

Chihiro asked him while drinking black tea from a bottle.

“Ah, it’s nothing. I leveled up earlier, right? I can learn a new skill after leveling up once more... but it looks like I’ll have to defeat around ten island bosses to get there.”

Chihiro silently mouthed the phrase “ten island bosses” and showed a shocked expression.

“That is quite the number. It sounds difficult.”

“That’s right. The ability of my Divine Works 『Demonic Sword』 is very useful, but on the other hand, the number of skills I can use is quite low. A new skill is guaranteed make my Divine Works more powerful, so I want to obtain it.”

“Aren’t there any good ways to go about it?”

“Well, sure... but even so, I’m not sure it will work out.”

While struggling to decide on what to do, Kazaya stuffed the last piece of bread into his mouth.

“Putting that aside, it looks like you’ve become quite strong, Senpai. Defeating a band of Class Goblins by yourself is considered to be amazing, and yet you managed to defeat demonic beasts of an even higher level by yourself.”

“Fufu, thank you. It’s all because of your excellent guidance, Tsugami-kun.”

Chihiro replied while smiling, and then suddenly looked downwards.

“But... now that I have come this far, I guess I can’t spend time with you anymore, Tsugami-kun.”

“Eh? Why is that?”

“Those monsters from earlier, they’re called goblins, right? You told me earlier that a Visitor is considered to be experienced if they can defeat the goblins on their own. Doesn’t that mean that we are nearly done with the lessons and you won’t be teaching me for much longer?”

“.....Ah. T-That’s right.”

Kazaya scratched his cheek as he realized that he had completely forgotten about that.

“I’d feel guilty if I forced you to accompany me for any longer, Tsugami-kun.

You originally preferred to work alone, right? You don't need to worry about me anymore. Thanks for all that you have done for me so far."

Chihiro said that with a smile, but her expression was tinged with loneliness. It was so slight that Kazaya only noticed it because he had spent a lot of time with her recently.

Chihiro was very good at keeping her emotions in check. She was probably suppressing her real feelings. Kazaya started to think while looking at Chihiro.

(...Hmm? What is this feeling?)

A certain thought occurred to Kazaya. Or rather, it was something that had been at the back of his mind for a long time.

(I see... So that's how it is.)

He finally realized it, and he was able to accept it.

".....Senpai."

Kazaya whispered that. He then looked into her eyes and steeled his resolve.

"Senpai, I—"

However, he was not able to finish his sentence. At that exact moment, a sound different from the one used to indicate a level-up rang out.

".....A Divination."

Should this be considered good timing or bad timing? Kazaya smiled bitterly.

"Divination?"

"Try opening your status screen."

Following his advice, Chihiro moved her finger through the air. Kazaya mirrored her action.

Apart from the three numbers that were usually displayed on the status screen, there was now some text on the screen as well.

『This is an important announcement from Grimveria! Starting now, the amount of exp that is earned by defeating regular demonic beasts will be increased for two days! What's more, defeating bosses will net you twice the

usual exp! Don't miss this opportunity to go hunting and collect plenty of raw materials and food!』

After reading the text carefully, Chihiro turned to look at Kazaya.

“.....What's with this overly enthusiastic and cheerful tone?”

“It sounds like an event from an online social game. Or rather, that's exactly what it is.”

Kazaya closed the display screen and started to explain.

“The goddess sends messages like this once in a while to rekindle the Visitors' enthusiasm for exploring islands. Most of them are just about defeating demonic beasts, but sometimes you can even get an unconditional level up or a rare skill that suits your Divine Works in exchange for obtaining some rare materials.”

“Oh? Looks like the goddess comes up with a lot of interesting things.”

Most likely, she wanted to end the current stalemate and increase the number of conquered islands.

That was what the goddess Grimveria wanted from the Visitors, after all.

“Still, double the the experience points, huh? Since you want to raise your level, isn't this perfect for you, Tsugami-kun?”

“.....Yes. That's right.”

Kazaya nodded in agreement. It was almost as though the goddess was supporting his growth.

“Senpai, there is something I would like your help with.”

From his tone, Chihiro must have sensed that he was being serious. Her expression stiffened slightly.

“A lot of people have asked me about this, and I always wanted to take up this challenge as well. You've gotten pretty good at fighting as well, Senpai, and now the goddess has given us a Divination. I think that now is the best time to go through with this.”

“What are you planning to do?”

“Would you be willing to... go on an expedition to an uncharted island with me?”

Chihiro tilted her head slightly to one side.

“Uncharted island... hmm? Wait, didn’t the old man at the Exchange say something about that to you a while ago?”

“That’s right. I didn’t tell you anything about them back then because I thought that you wouldn’t need that information for quite a while yet, but I will explain it to you know.”

Kazaya reached into his pocket and pulled out his map. He then spread it out on a flat rock that was nearby. Chihiro came closer while holding her sandwich in one hand.

“As I’ve told you before, Grimveria has a number of islands. Broadly speaking, the islands can be divided into two categories; 『Conquered』 and 『Unconquered』.”

“Conquered... Are those the islands that we have been visiting so far?”

“That’s right.”

Kazaya nodded.

“Conquered islands are those where the boss has already been defeated once and a large part of the island has been explored. However, there are islands that have not been conquered... Which means that the island boss has not been defeated even once.”

“Why is that?”

“There are a number of reasons, but the most important one is that the boss is simply too strong and no one is equal to the task. There are a lot of islands that have already been conquered and there is no danger of running out of food or materials in the near future, so there is no problem even if we avoid the uncharted islands for now. That is why those islands have been ignored for a long time.”

“How long, exactly?”

“I don’t know the details because I only came to this world for the first time a

few months ago, but it is likely that no one has attempted to visit one for a very long time. There are probably some islands that have not been visited since the Visitors first started to appear in this world.”

“.....And you want to challenge something like that, Tsugami-kun?”

Chihiro looked at his face for confirmation, and Kazaya nodded.

“I told you this when we first met, didn’t I? That my dream was to explore every inch of this world without leaving anything out. This is the first step towards that goal. Conquering an uncharted island, that is.”

After saying that, Kazaya spoke in a tone of caution.

“However, the islands have remained unconquered despite the number of Visitors who are present in this world. It should be obvious that the level of difficulty will be far higher than anything else you have experienced. What’s more, because the islands have been left alone for so long, we don’t have any information about the bosses. To be frank, our chances of victory are slim.”

“So that’s why you haven’t attempted to explore them until now.”

“That’s right. If I was still alone like I was back then, I might have once again given up. I would have given excuses like wanting to raise my skill just a little bit higher before trying. But I’m not alone anymore. You’re here with me, Senpai.”

Kazaya looked directly at Chihiro and continued to speak.

“If you are willing to help me, Senpai, I think we can make this work. No, I will definitely make it work.”

“But I heard that you preferred to work alone....”

“That’s right. But after seeing you fight earlier... I just felt like asking for your help.”

Kazaya said that in a slightly bashful tone, and even Chihiro started to blush.

“A-Ahem. Even so, no matter how much my level has gone up recently, I am still lacking experience.”

“That’s fine. You have a good sense for battle, Senpai. When it comes to action games, the most important things are reflexes, split-second judgment,

and the ability to keep your cool under any circumstances. From what I have seen so far, you possess all those attributes, Senpai.”

After declaring that, Kazaya unwaveringly bowed his head.

“Please help me. You will probably experience some scary and dangerous things, but I would like your help.”

“Sure!”

Chihiro replied without missing a beat.

“R-Really!? Are you sure you don’t want to give it some thought!?”

Her behavior was so unexpected that Kazaya was thrown for a loop.

“What are you talking about? You have been granting my wishes all this time, Tsugami-kun. If there’s a way for me to repay you, then I am the one who should be begging you to let me help!Also, It makes me happy that you decided to ask.”

Chihiro held Kazaya’s hand and smiled.

“You have been alone all this time, and the first person you picked to go on an adventure alongside you is me, right? It is an honor, and definitely something worth doing. Let us do it, Tsugami-kun. If there is anything that I can do... I will do my best to make your dream come true!”

“.....Thank you, Senpai.”

Kazaya covered Chihiro’s hand with his own and felt his chest grow warm. He was glad that he decided to say it. He truly thought that.

“In that case, see you in this world again after school tomorrow.”

“Yes. It’s time to kick off the expedition to the uncharted island!”

After exchanging those words, Kazaya and Chihiro nodded to each other.

○

The day of the expedition started off with clear weather. It was as though the world of Grimveria itself was supporting their endeavor. Kazaya was in high spirits as he boarded a ship along with Chihiro.

The ferryman opened his eyes wide in surprise when Kazaya told him that that they wanted to go to 『Island #10』.

“Island #10!? Sure, the uncharted islands might have raw materials and foodstuffs that the other islands don’t have. It might make the merchants happy, but that’s a dangerous place.”

“Yes, I know. Please take us there.”

Seeing Kazaya bow his head and request that, the ferryman stared at him silently for a while and eventually nodded.

“Alright. Since the 『Lightning-quick wielder of the Demonic Sword』 said that, I guess there is some hope. I’ll take you to the island.”

The ferryman instructed his fellow crewmates, and the ship began to move.

The ship cut through the blue ocean while being pushed forwards by the salty air for slightly more than an hour.

Before long, a small island covered with dense foliage came into view.

“Senpai, that is Island #10.... It is a place that no one has managed to conquer yet.”

Kazaya said that while almost trembling, but not due to fear. It was due to his near-uncontrollable curiosity. It was similar to the sense of excitement that a person playing an RPG would feel when they obtained a boat and set out for a new continent. What was waiting for them over there, and what would happen once they reached the shore? Just thinking about those things made his heart beat faster.

“What is this feeling? I’m really looking forward to it. It’s the same feeling as when I first came to this world.”

Chihiro smiled broadly. Perhaps she felt the same way.

Eventually, the ship arrived at Island #10. The two of them disembarked and walked up the beach.

In front of them lay a dense jungle that looked similar to the depths of the Amazon rainforest. The entire island was covered with tall trees. They could hear the cries of mysterious animals coming from various directions.

“Uwaah, this is unsettling. It feels like there might be lions living in there.”

Chihiro gulped while looking up at the trees of the jungle. As expected, even she was experiencing an indescribable sense of unease.

“Lions don’t live in dense jungles, Senpai.”

“I-I knew that already. In that case, how about sparrows?”

“Even if there were sparrows in there, why would that be a problem!?”

Kazaya retorted, and Chihiro stuck her tongue out at him. Thanks to the usual banter, Kazaya felt more at ease. He thought that Chihiro had intentionally spoken frivolously for exactly that reason, but...

“If you turn ‘jungle’ into ‘jingle’, it feels more like a foreign festival, right?”

When he heard her mutter that to herself, he realized that she was just talking without thinking.

“.....There’s no telling what might happen. Let’s be careful.”

Kazaya said that and started walking, and Chihiro followed him.

Kazaya summoned a demonic sword to clear away the undergrowth in their path. The dense vegetation around them blocked the sunlight and plunged their surroundings into deep darkness. It was difficult to see more than a few feet ahead. At this rate, they could be ambushed at any time.

“Hmm?”

Chihiro let out an inquisitive sound. When Kazaya looked around, he saw that Chihiro had stopped walking as if she had discovered something. When he followed her line of sight, he saw a small creature sitting under a tree a short distance away.

If you had to compare it to an animal from Earth, it looked a lot like a rabbit. It had long ears, fluffy white fur, and red eyes. However, it had two tails and a sharp horn growing out of its forehead.

“It’s so cute! Is that a demonic beast too?”

That was probably the case, but even Kazaya had never seen anything like it before. It appeared to be a creature that did not live on the other islands. The

rabbit—or whatever it was—was staring intently at them. However, Kazaya could not sense and hostility from it. If anything, he felt that it just stopped to take a look because it was curious about them.

“What are you called?”

Chihiro bent down and talked to the creature. However the rabbit look-alike just tilted its head to one side.

“It’s not going to answer you, Senpai. It is a demonic beast, after all.”

“You can’t know that for sure! It wouldn’t be strange if there were demonic beasts that were capable of communicating with us!”

That was certainly plausible. It was possible that he had just not met any demonic beasts of that kind so far, and there was a chance that the other uncharted islands might have intelligent demonic beasts as well.

“Come here~ I won’t hurt you or anything. I definitely won’t do anything to you, so just come over here for a little while~ I’m not lying, I really won’t do anything to you~”

Chihiro looked at the rabbit look-alike and beckoned towards it. However, it did not come any closer to her.

“What you just said sounded like something a villain would say.”

Kazaya said that, but it didn’t look like the rabbit look-alike was wary of them. It was just sitting there with its nose twitching, as if it was expecting something.

“Should we try to get closer to it instead?”

“That’s dangerous. Demonic beasts basically consider humans to be their enemies. It might be a trap.”

“That might be true, but... something so small couldn’t possibly do anything dangerous.”

Kazaya scratched his head while thinking that she had a point, and Chihiro slowly approached the rabbit look-alike. It took a step back at first, but it didn’t look like it was going to run away.

In fact, once Chihiro reached its side and cautiously stretched her hand out

towards it, it meekly allowed itself to be patted.

“Look, it’s perfectly safe. It’s friendly. So cute—!”

“I guess you were right.”

Kazaya felt let down as he had been standing ready with a Demonic sword just in case something happened.

(Was I overthinking it? I assumed that all demonic beasts were ferocious, but maybe there are exceptions...?)

He might need to change the way he looked at demonic beasts in the future. Just as he was thinking that...

All of a sudden, he sensed the presence of something massive just behind the rabbit look-alike. It was something that Kazaya was only able to sense due to his extensive experience in fighting against demonic beasts; an overwhelming killing intent that sent shivers down his spine.

“This is.... !?”

Kazaya was struck dumb when he took his eyes off the rabbit look-alike and looked above it.

He saw a beast that towered over them. Its body was completely covered in needle-like bristles, and it had arms like logs with claws that resembled knives. It had bloodshot, red eyes and sharp fangs set in irregular intervals were visible inside its open mouth. It looked like a cross between a porcupine and a bear. This was yet another demonic beast that he had never seen before.

He had not noticed its approach because of the dark surroundings.

“Senpai! Get away from there!”

Kazaya hurriedly shouted directions, turned around, and started to run.

The demonic beast swung one of its arms and easily gouged furrows in the ground where the two of them had been standing just an instant ago.

Clumps of dirt and dust were sent flying into the air, and the demonic beast roared in frustration as its prey avoided its attack.

However, what was surprising was not just the power behind that attack.

While expelling air from its mouth, the porcupine-bear swung its tail like a whip.

The rabbit look-alike they had seen earlier was attached to the end of that sharp tail. That didn't mean that the rabbit look-alike was clinging to its tail or anything.

"The creature from earlier... is growing out of that thing's tail!?"

Chihiro shouted in a confused voice. She was right. The tail of the demonic beast and the rump of the rabbit look-alike were fused together. In other words, the rabbit look-alike was a part of the porcupine-bear's body.

".....I see. So it was a fake bait."

After realizing that, Kazaya ground his teeth.

He had heard that monkfish that dwelt in the depths of the ocean would use the shining light that was attached to their foreheads to lure their prey, and assault them from under the sand when the prey had let down its guard.

This porcupine-bear had done the same thing.

"I can't forgive this demonic beast for using something so cute as bait. It's time for your punishment!"

Chihiro arched her fine eyebrows and summoned her own Divine Works. She nocked an arrow of light and shot it out. The arrow flew true and scored a direct hit on the porcupine-bear. It faltered for a second, but immediately recovered its posture.

Not only that, it faced Kazaya and immediately charged towards them.

"Senpai, dodge to the right!"

After saying that, Kazaya rolled to his left. Without missing a beat, he raised his demonic sword and jumped in to attack.

"Ferocious beast, I swear by the title of Visitor, I will deliver your just punishment!"

The instant before his sword pierced the porcupine-bear, a shrill sound rang out.

The porcupine-bear had swung its tail and used it as a shield. It felt as hard as steel.

“Your defence is not bad. It looks like you are quite capable after all!”

The porcupine-bear swung its tail at him the moment he landed, so he jumped backwards to gain some distance. Although he had the Protective Barrier, it would not do to reduce its durability needlessly.

(The most effective way to deal with an enemy like this is to crush it with overwhelming force or to choose a method that doesn't require physical contact, but.....)

However, the porcupine-bear was freely swinging its tail around and preventing him from getting close to it. Rushing in blindly would be counterproductive. In that case, his options were limited.

“Senpai, use your 『Fragmentation Arrow』. But fire it a little ahead of the target.”

He was talking about the exploding arrow she had used the other day, one of the skills of her Divine Works.

For a second, Chihiro looked like she didn't under what he was saying, but she immediately nodded. She probably believed that he wouldn't say something like that for no reason.

“Please fire on my signal!”

The instant Chihiro raised her bow, Kazaya broke into a sprint. The porcupine-bear roared and raised its paw to strike down the foolish opponent who had dared to jump within its reach.

“—Now!”

An arrow flew forward with great speed and struck the ground immediately in front of him. The instant it touched the ground, it exploded and turned into shards. However, because it had not struck the enemy, all it did was to open up a hole in the ground and kick up a large amount of dust.

However, that was exactly what Kazaya had been waiting for.

Due to the thick dust hanging in the air, the porcupine-bear had lost sight of

him. Taking advantage of that opening, Kazaya moved to the creature's flank and shouted.

"Ye weapon clad in freezing storms, appear in my hand—Hailstorm King!"

The porcupine-bear figured out his location from the sound of his voice and swung its tail down at him. The attack hit his Protective Barrier and bounced off, but taking a single attack of that caliber was not a big deal.

Kazaya gripped the sword that had appeared and pointed its slender blade at the giant creature before him. A cold wind blew around his surroundings, and the porcupine-bear's body was frozen solid instantly. Without hesitating for even a second, Kazaya dispelled the weapon he was currently holding and summoned a different weapon.

"Ye heavenly weapon that cuts through all of creation, appear in my hand—Azure Sky King!"

He grabbed the sword that was longer than he was tall with both hands.

"Return your soul to the heavens!"

He swung the sword down from overhead in one swift strike. Due the fact that it was frozen solid, the porcupine-bear could not make a single move to avoid it and just shattered into pieces.

They had succeeded in killing the enemy. Kazaya released his pent-up breath and stood up straight.

"You did it!"

Chihiro called out to him while coming closer.

"Yeah. Still, I've never seen a demonic beast like this before. It was really quite a shock. Just what I would expect from an uncharted island."

Kazaya started to think while taking out his Insect Cage to store the remnants of the porcupine-bear.

(I managed to defeat it, but smashing it to pieces after freezing it doesn't leave behind much in the way of raw materials... Besides, it was a new demonic beast that no one has ever seen before, maybe I should start thinking of a more efficient way to capture things.)

While he was thinking about things like that, Chihiro asked him a question.

“By the way, what is this demonic beast called?”

“Hmm? Ah, it doesn’t have a name. Not yet, at least.”

“I see. But all the other demonic beasts we’ve encountered until now had names, right?”

“Ah. Those are names that were arbitrarily decided by the Visitors who first encountered and defeated them. The names get circulated in places like taverns, and eventually everyone starts calling them by those names.”

That was the reason why the demonic beasts had names like 『Orc』 and 『Slime』, words that would commonly appear in manga or games from Earth.

“Oh? In that case, it should be fine for us to give this one a name, right? What do you think of something like ‘Porcupine-Bear Tarou’!?”

Upon hearing that name, Kazaya’s knees nearly gave way.

“Umm... It might become a name that everyone uses, so let’s try to think of a cooler name, okay?”

“Eeehh? I thought that was a pretty cool name, though. In that case, how about something like Bear Spears Mauzer Growls?”

“It’s too long and overblown! Why is always such extremes with you...”

The image of Gori-san suddenly darted through his mind.

“All you do is complain. In that case, why don’t you give it a name!?”

“.....Fine. How about 『Spears Bear』?”

“Oh? It’s nice and simple. A Spears Bear, or a Spebear for short!”

“No, there’s no need to shorten it.”

Kazaya once again started walking after shaking his head.

It was not just the demonic beasts that were unfamiliar. The island was filled with flora and fauna that Kazaya had never seen before on any of the other islands.

“Hey, Tsugami-kun, do you think this is edible?”

Chihiro was holding out a fruit that looked like a lemon. However it was covered in green spots that made it look like it was diseased.

“.....It looks poisonous, don't you think?”

“Really? But you know what they say, the worse it looks, the better it tastes! It might be okay!”

“Going by that logic, even poisonous toadstools should be fine to eat.”

They were all colored gaudily in red and white, after all.

“Huh.... I guess you have a point. Yep. Eating it is probably a bad idea.. But if I eat it and it turns out ot be okay, I would be a pioneer. I'm going to eat it. I'm going to eat it, Tsugami-kun!”

“There's no point in trying to be a pioneer if you end up dead! I'll just put it away in my Insect Cage for now.”

Kazaya sucked the lemon-like fruit into his Insect Cage to keep Chihiro from eating it.

“Ah, in that case, how about that fruit, Tsugami-kun?”

“That one looks even scarier. It looks like a cross between a mango, an eggplant, and a pineapple. I don't even want to think about how it tastes.”

“That's why I said that we should become pioneers in the field of fruit! That's something only we can do since we came to an uncharted island!”

“And what if we end up poisoning ourselves? I don't want that!”

“Hmph. Such a pity. Tsugami-kun, you are lacking the mentality of an explorer..... Oh, look at that plant. Doesn't it look like the Tokyo Skytree?”

“Ah, you're right. It looks exactly like the Skytree. That's not something you see everyday, so let's take a picture.”

The two of them had a lot of fun exploring the unknown island that was full of things they had never seen before.

“Still, where do you think the boss of this island is? We haven't found the slightest hint of its location so far.”

“You're right. On the other islands, the boss would usually be found roughly

at the center of the island, so that's why I'm heading to the center of this island as well."

Kazaya thought that it would be nice to have a hint of some sort, when he heard a loud noise.

".....Hmm? What was that?"

It was coming from the direction that they were headed in. Kazaya glanced at Chihiro and the two of them nodded to each other silently, and he picked up the pace.

After moving through the thick undergrowth, they came across a sight that they had not expected.

"Hell yeah, let's do thiiiiisss!"

The man who was carrying a large rucksack and let out a yell that sounded like it would reverberate throughout the island was none other than Souya Tohru. His raised arm was covered in a shell of steel, and his fist was clenched. In front of him was a demonic beast that looked like a rhinoceros.

The demonic beast had a large number of horns that looked like double-edged swords growing out of its forehead. It snorted and kicked the ground multiple times before suddenly charging. In response, Tohru faced it head on.

He leaned forward, pulled back his fist, and nailed the demonic beast squarely in the face with a punch.

"Haaaaaa! Take this! 『Great Ironclad Smash』!"

After he yelled that, his fist began to emit a large amount of light. The next second, a loud sound similar to that of an excavator breaking through dense bedrock reverberated throughout the surroundings, and a giant spear of light ripped through the demonic beast's body.

The rhinoceros-like demonic beast's eyes rolled up in its head and it collapsed.

".....Amazing. Is that Souya-kun's Divine Works?"

"That's right. His Divine Works is called 『Bomb Lance』. A spear bursts out from the tip of that gauntlet-like weapon and takes down the target. Have you

heard of a tool called a nail gun that is used by carpenters? This is something like a scaled-up version of that.”

After explaining that to Chihiro, Kazaya called out to Tohru who was storing the remains of the rhinoceros-like demonic beast in his Insect Cage.

“So you came here as well, Souya.”

Hearing that, Tohru looked in their direction and approached them with a wave and a smile.

“Kazaya! So you ended up coming here as well? Were you baited by the double exp campaign?”

“Pretty much. Still, it’s surprising that we picked the same island.”

As there were other uncharted islands besides the one they were currently standing on, Kazaya felt a strange sense of fate.

“By the way, I didn’t come here alone!”

Saying that, Tohru pointed behind him and turned around as though he was inviting them to follow.

Kazaya glanced at Chihiro and she nodded in agreement. After confirming that, Kazaya followed Tohru.

He had a faint inkling of who Tohru was talking about, and when they reached a clearing, he saw a familiar person there.

As he had expected, Kotobuki Izumi was standing there with her hands in her pockets.

The demonic beast that Izumi was fighting against looked like an insect that was twice her size. It had a polished carapace that had a speckled pattern on it, and a small head with a pair of pincers that looked strong enough to cut through anything. It looked a lot like the long-horned beetle that lived on Earth.

The demonic beast moved towards her with a rustling sound, but Izumi didn’t so much as bat an eyelid. She just stood there with a provocative smile.

“Isn’t Kotobuki-san in danger?”

Chihiro asked Kazaya in a low voice, but he just shook his head.

“She’ll be fine. Kotobuki is one of Grimveria’s veteran Visitors, after all.”

As if to prove Kazaya’s words....

Izumi slightly straightened her body and raised her hand against the demonic beast that was about to trap her in its pincers.

“—Go on, then.”

She snapped her fingers, causing a dry sound. The next instant, the insect-like demonic beast was securely wrapped in multiple layers of vines that came shooting out of nowhere. At the same time, they felt a vibration in the ground beneath their feet and something appeared from the shadows.

The thing that appeared was covered in leaves and moss, and it looked to be around ten meters tall. It was a giant humanoid that looked like a tree. It had probably been crouching in the shadows and hiding until now.

The giant approached the demonic beast that Izumi pointed at and wordlessly raised its fist.

In the next instant, a low sound reverberated through the surroundings. The demonic beast was easily crushed by the giant, like a child killing an insect.

After Izumi confirmed that the demonic beast had been crushed, she pulled out her Insect Cage while speaking.

“Good work, you can rest now.”

Hearing that, the giant knelt down and became motionless. It looked like a robot that had its power source turned off.

“This is in a completely different category from the two of us, Tsugami-kun. What exactly is her Divine Works?”

Chihiro asked in a slightly shocked tone.

“Her Divine Works is called 『Puppet』. She can freely control any inorganic matter or plants that she touches. As you can see from that giant, she can even change the shape of trees and boulders to a certain extent to suit her needs. It’s a very useful ability.”

As Kazaya explained that to Chihiro, Izumi turned in their direction.

“Oh? So you came as well, Kazaya.”



“Yeah. I didn’t expect both you and Souya to come to the same place as well, Kotobuki. I guess we think alike.”

Hearing Kazaya say that, Izumi did not bother to hide the look of disgust on her face.

“Having the same idea as you is one thing, but I don’t want to be told that I had the same idea as Tohru. Just thinking about that is annoying.”

“You can say that, but we ended up having the same idea after all! No matter what you say, the two of us always end up in the same place!”

Tohru walked closer to Izumi and slapped her on the back several times.

“Hey, don’t touch me so casually! The two of us just can’t seem to get rid of each other, that’s all!”

“Hahaha! My bad, my bad!”

Tohru let out an exaggerated laugh with no sign of remorse on his face.

“I wonder if I should seriously send him flying for once. Using my giant.”

“Divine Works don’t work against other Visitors. They are only useful against demonic beasts.”

“I know that!”

Kazaya decided to give her a warning just in case, and Izumi snapped at him. He had apparently said something unnecessary.

“By the way, if you and Tohru are here to defeat the boss as well, I can’t afford to be careless. Putting Tohru aside for the moment, I get the feeling you’ll defeat the boss before me if I let down my guard, Kazaya.”

“Hahaha! If you let down your guard, I will surpass you as well!”

Izumi grimaced and covered her ears after Tohru yelled that in a loud voice.

“Geez, how many times do I have to tell you to control your volume when you speak!? What are you, a broken TV?”

“Hahahaha! A broken TV, she said! Hahahahaha!”

“It wasn’t that funny! Are you making fun of me!?”

“Hahahaha! No, I’m not! A broken TV, hahahahahaha! Hahahahaha!”

“Stop laughing already!”

Izumi kicked Tohru’s shin, but it didn’t seem to affect him at all.

“Anyway, the friendly banter ends here. After this, it’s going to be a race to see who can defeat the boss first.”

Izumi said that with her hands on her hips, and Tohru smacked his fist into his palm.

“That sounds good! So we’re rivals, huh!? Waaaaaaah! I’m getting fired up!”

“That’s good, you can just go ahead and burn.”

“Hahaha! I won’t turn into charcoal! I will live along with the flames foreveeeeer!”

“What the heck is wrong with this guy’s brain..... Anyway!”

After showing a stumped expression for a second, Izumi recovered her poise.

“I will be the one to defeat this island’s boss! That has already been decided!”

“Hey Kotobuki, do you know the location of this island’s boss?”

Izumi looked at Kazaya with an exasperated expression when he asked her that.

“Look here, Kazaya. I just said that we are rivals. What makes you think that I would hand over information to a person who is competing against me?”

“I think it’s around five kilometers north of here. I looked over the whole island from an elevated position and saw that there was an abnormally large cave over there. That’s probably its nest.”

However, Tohru gave Kazaya the information without hesitating.

“Why the heck did you tell him that so easily!? Are you an idiot!? Are you actually an idiot!?”

Izumi stretched her hands out, grabbed Tohru’s collar, and started shaking him.

“Hahaha! I already gave you the information earlier, Izumi! It wouldn’t be fair if we kept it a secret only from Kazaya!”

“Aargh, this is why I hate people who are into sports! Damn idiots with their concept of fair play!”

After stamping her feet in frustration, Izumi glared at Kazaya with a sharp gaze.

“Fine! So now we’re all at the same starting line! The competition starts now!”

“Sure, that sounds interesting. I’ll take you up on that challenge.”

Kazaya said as he thumped his chest, and Chihiro, who was standing beside him, also nodded.

“That’s right. We won’t lose to the two of you!”

Hearing that, the corners of Izumi’s mouth lifted up into grin.

“Just you wait and see. I’m going to defeat the boss for sure. Wake up, Golem!”

The tree giant stood up after hearing Izumi’s command. Izumi stepped on the hand that the giant held out and climbed up to its shoulder.

“Ah! That looks nice. I want one too!”

Chihiro said that as she looked at the giant. Kazaya also silently agreed with her. The otherworld fantasy feeling of that sight made him feel jealous.

Izumi waved her hand, and the giant started to walk with slow but large strides.

“Alright. I guess I should go as well. See you later, Kazaya!”

After adjusting his rucksack, Tohru also energetically walked away.

“Alright! We can’t lose to them either! Hip hip! Let’s go!”

“Eh!? What about the ‘hurray’? Senpai, what about the ‘hurray’!? It doesn’t feel right if you leave that out!”

After the two of them had left, Kazaya and Chihiro also set out for the

location where they would likely find the boss while talking about one thing or another.

The person who initially had an overwhelming lead in this impromptu race to the boss was Izumi. The giant she was riding on was like a moving fortress, after all.

The giant easily cut a swathe through even the tallest trees that blocked its path and forcefully tore through the annoying underbrush. The strides of the giant were already a lot larger than a person's, so the gap between Izumi and others only continued to widen.

"Oh, come on. Isn't Kotobuki-san's Divine Works kind of unfair?"

"That's true. But Divine Works are random, after all. There's no way to choose what Divine Works you get."

After replying to Chihiro, Kazaya let out a small sigh. There was currently no way to tell what criteria the goddess looked at while assigning the Divine Works to the Visitors.

"Hahahaha! That's the way, Golem, keep moving forward! I'm going to write a novel based on this adventure and submit it to the Rookie of the Year contest!"

Obedying Izumi who was sitting on its shoulder and pointing forwards, the golem continued to run forward in the lead.

However, Izumi was not able to get carried away any for much longer.

It happened after they covered a few kilometers. Kazaya and the others who were making their way towards the boss while fighting against the demonic beasts suddenly heard a thunderous roar and ran forwards while wondering what had happened.

Once they arrived at the location, they saw that the golem had fallen over.

"Aah, seriously! Pull yourself together!"

After being scolded severely by Izumi, the golem stood up while rubbing its head.

The opponent that was giving Izumi a hard time was readily apparent.

“Uwaah... That’s harsh.”

Kazaya said that while looking at the 『wall』 that was in front of them. Strictly speaking, it wasn’t really a wall. It was a mountain of stone that seemed to stretch out endlessly to the left and the right. The peak of the mountain wasn’t all that high up, but it looked steep and difficult to climb.

Izumi’s golem started to climb up the rock face, but it looked like it was having a hard time. Although it was able to perform simple tasks like walking and attacking enemies without too much trouble, it apparently had difficulty with more complicated movements.

“Hahaha! Looks like your Divine Works is not perfect, Izumi!”

“Shut up!”

Hearing Tohru say that while laughing at the base of the mountain, Izumi replied angrily from above. However, as if to prove his words, the golem lost its footing and slowly slid back down to the ground.

“Ok, I guess I’ll go on ahead. Later, Kazaya!”

Saying that, Tohru put down his rucksack and took something out of it. It was rod-shaped and had a pointed tip, a tool that was known as an ice axe. After that, he took out a rope from the rucksack and wrapped it around his waist. He then swung the other end of the rope that had a hook attached to it, and energetically threw it upwards where the hook securely dug into the rock. After confirming that, Tohru used the ice axe to skilfully start climbing the mountain.

“Uwaah, Souya-kun looks really experienced at that. Is he really a high school student?”

Chihiro looked up at Tohru with an impressed expression, and Kazaya nodded.

“Apart from his club activities, he told me that he also goes bouldering as a hobby. I think he must have experienced climbs like this several times.”

Tohru was indeed heading towards the peak of the mountain at an astonishing pace. He had overtaken Izumi’s struggling golem in the blink of an eye.

“Well then... We can’t afford to sit around idle either. But how should we do

this? I have never climbed anything like this before. I can promise you that there is a greater than ninety percent chance that I will fall down.”

“Promising me that doesn’t make me feel any better. I have never climbed anything this steep, but I have been in similar situations before. I’ll do something about it... Ye endless chain that restrains for all of eternity, appear in my hand—Snakebite King!”

Kazaya gripped the demonic sword that he had summoned and pointed it upward.

The next instant, the blade started to extend like a living thing. After extending for quite a distance, the tip of the blade bent slightly and dug into the surface of the mountain. Seeing that, Chihiro’s eyes sparkled.

“Oh! So this is what you meant back then when you said that it could be used in different ways!”

After tugging on the sword several times to make sure it was firmly attached, Kazaya placed one foot against the rock face.

“However, we can’t go all the way to the top in one go like we are taking an elevator. If we tried that, the tip of the sword would probably break off because of the weight. We have no choice but to climb up by ourselves while slowly reducing the length of the sword. Here, Senpai, hold the sword along with me.”

Chihiro nodded and gripped the hilt of the sword. The two of them started climbing the mountain while holding the sword in one hand and using their other hand to grip handholds on the rock face.

Thanks to the sword, the two of them felt like they had the help of a rope that was being pulled up by someone above them. That made it easier than climbing up normally, but it didn’t change the fact that it was still a difficult climb.

In addition, since Chihiro was still relatively new to being a Visitor, their progress was painfully slow.

However, Kazaya was not doing much better. Despite having some experience in such things, it was by no means something he could do easily. His strength and stamina were higher than usual thanks to the goddess’s blessing, but climbing such a steep mountain was understandably taxing.

Tohru had climbed so far up that he had disappeared from their sight long ago, and despite the fact that Izumi's golem was lagging behind him, she had climbed up high enough that her golem looked tiny. Kazaya and Chihiro were in last place.

"Ughh... This is bad. At this rate, we might lose to the two of them."

Chihiro whispered in an anxious tone. Kazaya replied in breathless voice.

"At this point in time, it certainly looks that way. However, the two of us have one big advantage over them."

"Advantage?"

"The fact that we are not alone."

While smiling, Kazaya reached out and gripped the next protrusion on the side of the mountain.

"The two of us are here together, Senpai. I am sure that we will eventually come to understand the significance of the fact that we are exploring this island as a team. So it's fine. We will definitely make up for this delay!"

".....That's right! Nicely put, Tsugami-kun!"

Chihiro's lips relaxed into a slight smile after hearing Kazaya's confident words.

One step at a time. Slowly, but surely. Kazaya and Chihiro single-mindedly made their way towards the peak of the mountain. Eventually, after a certain amount of time....

".....Yeah! We made it!"

Kazaya gripped a rock at the peak and pulled himself up.

He turned back and extended his hand towards Chihiro. After she gripped his hand, he energetically pulled her up.

Feeling the sense of accomplishment that came from reaching the peak, Chihiro put her hand on her chest.

"We did it... I felt a little scared, but it was a lot of fun!"

"I know what you mean. This is the true charm of Grimveria."

Kazaya let out a breath and looked forwards.

The top of the mountain had a rugged surface with many rocks, and there was a cave some distance away.

“Oh no, it looks like the two of them have gone ahead of us.”

“We should hurry up as well.”

Chihiro said that after looking around their surroundings. Kazaya replied to her and started walking quickly. However, when they had almost reached their destination, they ran into something unexpected.

Tohru and Izumi came out of the cave all of a sudden. For a second, Kazaya was worried that they had defeated the boss already, but something seemed off.

The two of them seemed to be in a great hurry as they ran towards him while waving their hands.

“It’s no good! Kazaya, it’s no good! Don’t go in there!”

“That guy was insane! This is impossible! We need to rethink our strategy!”

Kazaya furrowed his eyebrows after seeing how much the two of them were panicking despite being experienced Visitors.

“What’s wrong? What did you see?”

“No wonder this island is uncharted. I’ve never seen anything else like that boss. I mean...”

In the middle of Tohru’s sentence, they heard a piercing cry.

At the same time, something burst out through the cave entrance.

“Hiii.....!”

Seeing that, Chihiro let out a scared cry that was unlike her.

“This is... the boss of Island #10?”

Kazaya’s eyes were wide open in surprise.

The creature’s giant body was covered in a hard carapace. It was long enough to encircle the mountain area surrounding the cave, and it had an innumerable

number of short legs. The body of the creature had two red orbs that looked like jewels, and in front of those were a pair of fangs. It crawled on the ground and rushed towards them at a terrifying speed.

Comparing it to a creature from their own world, it was basically.....

“N-No! Not a centipede! Anything but that.....!”

Chihiro crouched down and covered her face. That’s right. The demonic beast in front of them was a gigantic centipede.

“That thing is not just an ordinary centipede!”

Izumi touched the ground and called forth a golem made of stone. She tried to intercept the monster, but it let out another ear-splitting cry.

The moment it did that, something astonishing happened.

Izumi’s golem turned into sand and crumbled in the blink of an eye.

“Dammit, this really is impossible! Be careful, Kazaya. This boss.....”

Tohru charged towards the giant centipede and raised his arm. The moment his fist made contact with the monster’s body, he activated his Divine Works and a large amount of light started to flow out of his fist. However, when the creature let out a cry once again, the light disappeared.

“.....This boss has the ability to nullify our Divine Works!”

The giant centipede shook its head and sent Tohru flying. He didn’t take any direct damage thanks to his Protective Barrier, but he rolled across the ground multiple times before crashing into a nearby boulder.

“As expected of an uncharted island.... How interesting. If the enemy is strong, that just makes it all the more worth defeating!”

Kazaya created a basic demonic sword that didn’t have any abilities, and gripped it strongly.

(I’d like to get rid of that ability that nullifies Divine Works, but I have no idea where to start.)

Assuming that the creature was somehow using its voice to cancel their skills, he still had no idea how to defend against something like that. Maybe he just

needed to lop off its head, but if it managed to cancel his ability before he could do that, he would be a sitting duck for a counterattack.

“For starters, let’s try out different methods of fighting it. Senpai, I’ll draw its attention so please attack it while it is distracted...”

Kazaya stopped speaking before completing his sentence. Chihiro was still in the same state as before, crouched down and trembling. There wasn’t a shred of her usual courageous self to be seen.

“I-I’m sorry. Not centipedes... I just can’t handle centipedes....”

Ah, that was right. Kazaya remembered the story he had heard from her back then and let out a sigh.

“Understood. I’ll try and do something about it by myself!”

“Eh? B-But, Tsugami-kun....”

“I am the one who invited you on this adventure, Senpai. You don’t need to force yourself.”

Kazaya turned to face the giant demonic beast and stared at it.

“Alright then, bring it on. My demonic sword will cut through your evil ways!”

Kazaya dashed forward while feeling the adrenaline rush that came with the impending battle. He avoided the attack that had been aimed at him, jumped up, and swung his sword down. However, the sword broke into pieces while letting out a ringing sound. The carapace-like material that covered the enemy was uncommonly hard.

“In that case, how about this? Ye heavenly weapon that cuts through all of creation, appear in my hand—Azure Sky King!”

Kazaya used both hands to grip the greatsword that he had summoned. He then swung it through the air without missing a beat.

The tip of the sword left a large scratch on the body of the enemy.

“See that? No matter how strong your armor is, it is no match for my sword! I’ll just continue like this and....!”

Kazaya decided to use the momentum of his last attack and go on the

offensive, but as soon as the giant centipede turned to stare at him, he felt a bad premonition run through his entire body.

Sure enough, the creature let out a piercing cry and caused his greatsword to vanish.

He tried to immediately summon another demonic sword, but before he could do that, he received a powerful headbutt from the creature and was forcefully sent flying backwards.

He managed to somehow land on his feet, but when he checked the condition of his Protective Barrier, he was shocked. The gauge had been reduced by roughly half of the total value. If he took another attack like the previous one, he would be forcefully removed from the battle and returned to the start point.

“Dammit, looks like I can’t make any careless moves.”

Kazaya made to stand up while muttering that under his breath, but he suddenly felt his hair stand on end.

Faster than he could react, the giant centipede had closed the distance and was right in front of him.

He hurriedly summoned the demonic sword of wind and sent a shockwave flying towards the creature. The sudden attack caused the creature to bend backwards, but it immediately fixed its posture and rushed towards him once again. And then came the creature’s special ability; the power to nullify Divine Works. Kazaya’s next move would not make it in time.

“Kazaya, watch out!”

Izumi’s shout rang out, and Kazaya put his arm up to defend against the creature’s fangs that were bearing down on him.

However, just before he received the attack, he saw the creature’s face engulfed in an explosion.

The giant centipede was sent flying, and it fell to the ground.

“G-Get away from Tsugami-kun! You monster!”

Chihiro was standing with her bow held in her hand. Although her face was still pale, her gaze had recovered its usual strength. Kazaya understood that he

had been saved thanks to the arrow that she had fired at the creature.

“S-Senpai, I thought you couldn’t handle centipedes?”

“O-Of course I can’t handle them! To be honest, I still feel like crouching down and avoiding reality. I want to turn around, run back to the city as quickly as I can, and eat the delicious sweets that Bado-san makes to my heart’s content!”

“There’s such a thing as being too honest!!”

“I know! But you know what!? I can’t bear to do that!”

Despite the fact that her knees were trembling, Chihiro spoke in a determined tone.

“You are very important to me, Tsugami-kun. Ever since I came to this world, you have given me a lot of things. So now it’s my turn! After you finally chose me to be your partner... If I run away from this fight, I won’t be able to forgive myself!”

She summoned an arrow and pulled back the bowstring.

“If it is for the sake of making your dream come true, I don’t care if the enemy is a centipede or a demon, bring it on! You bastard!”

The giant centipede lifted itself off the ground, faced Chihiro, and opened its mouth.

Kazaya predicted that it was going to use that cry again, but then he suddenly realized something.

Just before it let out the cry, the two jewels on its body shined briefly.

The next moment, the arrow that Chihiro had released vanished before hitting its target.

...So that was it. Kazaya figured out the trick behind the creature’s ability. It was not the creature’s cry that nullified their Divine Works. That was probably a feint to distract them from the real source.

“Senpai! Aim for the jewels on its body! Time your attack to coincide with the instant they shine!”

“Eh!? O-Okay, I understand!”

Despite his terse instructions, she probably understood that he had a plan of some sort. Chihiro raised her bow and faced the giant centipede as it rushed towards her. She nocked an arrow and aimed carefully.

The creature tried to use its nullifying ability against her once again, so Kazaya shouted out.

“What are you looking at, insect!? Your opponent is over here! Ye who aspires to mow down sins with all-consuming hellfire, appear in my hand—Scorching King!”

Kazaya stabbed the sword that was wrapped in flames into the ground, causing the ground below the centipede to turn into magma. The giant centipede started to burn, releasing a foul smell. The creature writhed in pain and switched its target to Kazaya, intending to get rid of the nuisance first.

Chihiro immediately shot her arrow. The arrow let out a flash of light like a falling meteor and split into two while it was moving towards its target. This was one of Chihiro’s skills. The two arrows perfectly skewered the two jewels that were attached to the giant centipede’s body.

The creature let out a shriek and then cried out several times.

However, Kazaya’s demonic sword showed no signs of disappearing. It looked like his guess had worked out after all.

“Ye heavenly weapon that cuts through all of creation, appear in my hand—Azure Sky King!”

Kazaya summoned the greatsword and rushed towards the enemy.

He ran up the body of the giant centipede that was writhing in pain, jumped up, and raised his weapon.

“...My sword will shatter that soul of yours!”

He forcefully swung the sword downwards. The moment his sword made contact with the creature’s head, he pushed down on the blade with all his weight and cut straight through the creature’s body.

Once Kazaya landed on the ground, he pulled the sword free.

As soon as he did that, the giant centipede’s body split into two pieces and

the separate halves crashed to the ground in opposite directions with a dull sound. The creature did not rise again.

“.....I beat it.”

Kazaya stood there with a blank look on his face as though he was unable to believe that he had actually done it, but before long the delight started to slowly show on his face. As soon as that delight reached the maximum point...

“I defeated the boss of the uncharted islaaaaaaand!!”

He raised both his hands in a triumphant pose.

He promptly pulled out his Insect Cage and sucked up the remnants of the giant centipede.

“Tsugami-kun!”

After he finished collecting everything, he heard Chihiro call out to him and turned around.

She ran up to him and hugged him tightly.

“Oof... S-Senpai!?”

“You did it! You actually did it, Tsugami-kun! Congratulations!”

Her voice was filled with happiness and she hugged him even tighter.

“A-Ah, yes. It’s all thanks to you, Senpai.”

“Not at all, it’s because of your hard work! I’m so glad I was able to help, Tsugami-kun!”

Chihiro spoke in a relieved tone.

“I always wanted to be able to help you, the person who taught me the meaning of happiness and fun.”

Kazaya felt a warm feeling rising up within his chest. He raised his arm and hugged Chihiro back.

“.....Senpai, I want to thank you too. I’m glad you were here with me.”

“Fufu, you should be grateful.”

Chihiro smiled at him and replied in a low voice. At that moment, a loud

sound suddenly began to play above their heads.

“I leveled up.”

“Oh no... I-I did it again.”

That sound seemed to make Chihiro come to her senses, as she said that and moved away from him. Her cheeks were red. Kazaya also cleared his throat to hide his embarrassment.

“.....Alright. I got a new skill!”

Kazaya looked at his level-up notification and clenched his fist, and Chihiro clapped loudly.

“Ah dammit.... So Kazaya ended up winning! But I definitely won't lose next time!”

Tohru looked up at the sky and lamented his loss, but he immediately turned a challenging gaze upon Kazaya. Kazaya also responded with a fearless smile.

“Sure. Bring it on. I'll win next time as well.”

“I won't lose either! Prepare yourself!”

Izumi crossed her arms and spoke in a huffy tone. At that moment, Chihiro asked a question.

“.....Ah, that's right. What is your new skill, Tsugami-kun?”

Just as Kazaya was about to answer Chihiro's question...

The ground beneath their feet rumbled and they heard a loud roar.

“.....Oi, oi. Oi, oi, oi.”

Tohru stood up with an understandably agitated look on his face.

“Hey. This is some sort of a mistake, right? Right!?”

Izumi also had an aghast expression as she covered her mouth. However, reality was cruel indeed.

Making a disgusting sound while crawling on the ground, 『that thing』 was closing in on them.

It was another giant centipede.

“I didn’t hear anything about there being two bosses!!”

Tohru let out a wail, but of course the giant centipede did not take his feelings into consideration. It displayed its animosity by rearing its head and letting out an ear-splitting cry.

“After we think that the last boss has been defeated, another one appears, huh? Stuff like this is typical of role playing games.”

Kazaya said that while remaining calm.

“.....W-What should we do? Tsugami-kun, should we deal with it the same way as the previous one?”

Chihiro looked to Kazaya for confirmation, but he shook his head.

“There is no need for that. I’ll finish this quickly.”

Kazaya faced the giant creature with his right hand stretched out to the side.

“Ye weapon clad in freezing storms, appear in my hand—Hailstorm King!”

He gripped the thin blade that had appeared with his right hand, and continued to speak.

“Equal Excitation. Ye bringer of storms, appear in my hand—Razor Wind King!”

As soon as he said that, a different sword appeared in his left hand.

“Dual swords!? Kazaya, is that...?”

Tohru asked that, and Kazaya smiled.

“That’s right. This is my new power!”

Using two types of demonic swords at the same time. Kazaya used the skill that he had just obtained a little while ago and raised his voice.

“By the Ice Emperor’s verdict, thou art sentenced to a prison of eternal ice! Twin Demonic Swords—Roaring Blizzard!”

Kazaya crossed the swords and swung them down as one. The temperature of the surroundings dropped sharply, and the giant creature let out a howl. The roaring wind and the ice that were created by Kazaya’s swords mixed together

and headed towards the enemy in the form of a violent, ice-laden tornado.

After taking that attack of freezing wind, the giant centipede turned into an ice sculpture without even having the chance to make its jewels shine.

“Senpai, use the Fragmentation Arrow!”

Hearing Kazaya’s order, Chihiro seemed to snap out of a daze. She nodded and let her arrow fly.

The arrow left a track of light behind it as it flew towards the giant centipede, struck its target, and exploded. The fragments of ice rained down onto the ground and melted in the blink of an eye. The only things left behind were the pitiful fragments of the demonic beast’s body.

“.....Oof, it looks like I overdid it a little. I can’t seem to adjust the power output properly just yet.”

Kazaya said that after letting out a breath, and then a thought ran through his mind.

(I wonder if ‘Roaring Blizzard’ was really okay...I wish I could have thought of a cooler name...)

At that time, a cheerful sound rang out. Chihiro immediately checked her level and muttered.

“It went up by five levels all at once....”

“Well, it was the boss of an uncharted island after all, and then there’s also the increased exp campaign.”

“H-Hey! What the heck was that!? Isn’t that way too dangerous!?”

While Kazaya replied to Chihiro with a smile, Izumi spoke up in an agitated tone.

“By summoning two demonic swords at once, it looks like the power of each sword is doubled and I can use that to fire off an attack. The two powers will be mixed together, so I will need to carefully select what swords I want to use.”

“What the hell! That’s so unfair! There’s no way to beat that!”



“There’s no point in telling me that....”

Izumi complained while stamping her foot, and Kazaya replied while looking troubled.

“Ah dammit, I can’t afford to waste any more time. If I don’t level up quickly and learn some new skills, all the uncharted islands will get cleared while I’m lagging behind! See you guys later, I’m heading back home!”

Izumi gripped her Teleportation Stone and vanished without a sound.

“Well then, I should probably head back as well. See you around, Kazaya!”

Tohru duplicated Izumi’s actions and vanished as well.

“.....I guess the two of us should go back too, Senpai.”

Kazaya called out to Chihiro who was sucking up the second giant centipede into her Insect Cage, and she turned around to look at him.

“Sure! By the way... You’re really amazing, Tsugami-kun. We struggled so much against that demonic beast, and yet you were able to beat it easily after gaining a single level. The truth is that you could have defeated them somehow even if I wasn’t here this time, right?”

Rather than sounding discouraged, it felt like she was teasing him. With that being the case, he could have also replied in a joking manner. However, Kazaya still decided to reply to her seriously.

“That’s not true. I would have beaten if you weren’t here, Senpai. Most likely, all three of us would have been beaten and forcefully sent back to the Capital.”

Kazaya looked directly into Chihiro’s eyes.

“Didn’t I tell you earlier? The time would come when we would understand the significance of being here together. It turned out just as I had predicted. We only won because of your help, Senpai.”

“.....Yeah, that’s true.”

“I pretty much always play solo when I’m gaming, but going on an adventure along with someone else was unexpectedly a lot of fun. After spending time

with you, I understood that very well, Senpai.”

Saying that, Kazaya smiled.

“You said that I taught you the meaning of having fun, Senpai, but at the same time, you taught me how to have a different kind of fun as well. So I’ll be counting on you in the future as well.”

Kazaya held out his hand, and Chihiro stared at his outstretched hand in wonder.

“Eh.... You mean...?”

“That’s right. If you’re okay with it, I would like to continue going on adventures with you, Senpai. Not as a trainer and a trainee, but as partners.”

“A-Are you sure? About having me as a partner.”

“More like, I wouldn’t want anyone other than you, Senpai.”

Kazaya honestly said the thing that had been on his mind all along.

“I want to stay with you forever, Senpai. As long as you are by my side... I can enjoy Grimveria much more than the time I spent adventuring alone. That is what I have come to feel. So... What do you say?”

“Tsugami-kun.....”

Chihiro’s cheeks turned scarlet as she continued to stare at the hand that he extended towards her.

Walking hand in hand as equals, and deepening their bonds... That was something she had never experienced before. However, before long, her expression changed.

“.....Sure.”

Beautiful and elegant, but also pure and free of concern.

“I will be counting on you as well, Tsugami-kun! I would love to have you as my partner!”

Chihiro gave Kazaya the best possible smile while taking his hand.

“T-Thank you. I was scared for a minute there, I thought you were going to

refuse.”

Seeing Kazaya pat his chest in relief, Chihiro smiled once again.

“There’s no way I would refuse! I have been waiting for you say those words to me all this time, after all!”

Kazaya turned red and scratched his head after hearing that.

“.....Ah, that’s right. The jewels on those demonic beasts from earlier were really pretty, how about using two of them to make a pair of pendants, Senpai?”

“Eh? Why?”

“Umm, as a memento for the first time the two of us cleared an uncharted island together... Ah, but they were attached to a centipede, so you wouldn’t like that, right? I’m sorry, just forget about it.”

Kazaya scratched his head while thinking that he had been careless.

“Not at all! Let’s do that, Tsugami-kun! They would be a proof of our bond... right?”

Chihiro gave him a wide smile.

“Eh? Aah, that’s right.”

Kazaya felt embarrassed after hearing Chihiro’s happy reply.

“.....Sorry. I said that without thinking, and now I’m feeling embarrassed as well.”

Seeing Kazaya’s reaction, Chihiro pressed her hand against her mouth and turned her face away.

“N-No, not at all!”

“I-It’s fine! Also, what I said earlier about you being important to me and stuff, that was just something I said on the spur of the moment so forget about it! It really doesn’t mean anything, okay!?”

Chihiro’s face was still red as she emphasised that point.

(I can’t believe that it didn’t mean anything when you show a reaction like

that, Senpai....)

Kazaya felt his cheeks growing warmer and he looked downwards.

(C-Can I really hope for this? Can I really hope for a dazzling everyday life with you, Senpai!?)

Kazaya worried about that as he struggled to rein in his heart that was beating wildly.

Final Chapter – Together with You

Tsugami Kazaya was an ordinary high school student.

He was not particularly intelligent, nor was he especially gifted at physical activities. He was not ugly, but he wasn't handsome either, and his body had a medium build. In short, he was an ordinary teenager, no matter how you looked at it. He was just one among a multitude of such boys within the country.

However, Kazaya had a secret.

After school, he would teleport to another world called Grimveria and explore the mysteries of the islands there while fighting against terrifying demonic beasts. He was just a regular boy in his own world, but he was something of a hero to the people in that other world.

He had no problems with living that sort of a double life, and since his days in Grimveria were so exciting and attractive, he was content to remain an unremarkable student at his school.

However, he felt that he had been attracting quite a bit of attention from the other students at his school lately.

There was only one reason for that. The presence of a person called Mikoto Chihiro.

Accomplished at both studies and physical activities. Possessed of beauty and grace. Calm and collected. Absolutely flawless in every way. One of a kind. There had never been a girl like her in the past, and never again would there be someone as perfect as her.

Most likely, any word or idiom used to describe beauty would fit her perfectly. This girl who looked like she came straight out of a painting was one year older than Kazaya and was his senior at his school. Despite the fact that every student at the school admired her, she was always cool and aloof and did not allow anyone to get close.... However, nobody knew the truth about her.

She actually liked games and manga and could be a little absent-minded. She also had a tendency to do outrageous things every once in a while.

She was the reason why there were rumors flying around about Kazaya. Everyone wanted to know why Mikoto Chihiro, who was known to everyone but did not allow anyone to approach her, was on such good terms with a plain-looking boy like Kazaya.

“Hey look, it’s Mikoto-senpai.”

“She’s really so beautiful....”

Kazaya could hear people saying things like that as he walked along the hallway at school.

The students who happened to be in Chihiro’s path while she was walking moved to either side to make way for her, just like Moses parting the Red Sea using a mythical power. While everyone else around her treated her as an object of worship and did not dare to approach her, she saw Kazaya and her eyes widened slightly.

Kazaya gave her a polite bow, and she nodded back in greeting. And then, as they passed by each other, Chihiro gently whispered into his ear.

“.....See you again at that place.”

Kazaya felt his heartbeat quicken when he heard that whisper that tickled his eardrum.

When Kazaya turned around to look at her, she stuck her tongue out slightly so that only he could see, and pulled something out from within her shirt. It was a pendant made from a red gemstone which had a beautiful shine to it. Kazaya also had one just like it.

After that, Chihiro reverted to her dignified gaze and walked away from him.

“Hey, Kazaya. Did Mikoto-senpai say something to you just now?”

Seeing Kazaya standing still in the hallway, his friend Maesaki asked him that as he passed by.

“Seriously, why are you the only person who is on good terms with Mikoto-senpai? Just tell me the reason already.”

Maesaki asked him that while clinging to him, and Kazaya replied.

“I wonder why.”

Back to the topic of Kazaya’s secrets. Until some time ago, he had just one. Now he had two.

The first secret was that he could freely travel to the other world called Grimveria whenever he wanted.

The other secret was that he went on adventures after school in that world with the Senpai that he adored and looked up to.

“Lately, you look like you’re having fun, Kazaya.”

Hearing Ayukawa’s voice laden with jealousy, Kazaya thought that she had a point.

He had fun before as well. However, things might become a lot more fun in the future.

That held true for both his life in the other world and his life at school. The reason for that was simple.

It was because Mikoto Chihiro was always by his side.



Afterword

I love school-themed romantic comedy stories in which boys and girls live out their exciting lives filled with bittersweet memories.

I love fantasy stories set in other worlds, in which boys and girls eagerly go through thrilling adventures.

However, I usually have to make a choice between the two.

I love both curry and pork cutlets, but ordering two separate dishes would cause problems (mainly stomach-related).

However.... Does it really have to be that way?

Isn't there a way to make it work somehow?

That's right... This world has something called pork cutlets with curry!

This work, 『Isekai Quest After School! *My Aloof Senpai Only Smiles When She's With Me*』, was born from such an idea.

For the people whom I have never met before, it's nice to meet you. People who are already familiar with me, it has been a while. The people who have read one of my different books that went on sale in November might be thinking, "What, this guy again?" That's right. It's me again. My name is Sorano Kazuki.

I decided to cherry-pick the best parts of both a school-themed romantic comedy and an otherworld fantasy and create a new and somewhat unreasonable story. I would be very glad if you enjoyed it.

I managed to attach two different genres together using the idea that people could easily travel between the other world and our current world.

I still wanted to have something new in the story, so I arrived at the idea of, "Wouldn't it be interesting if the heroine had completely different personalities in each of the worlds?"

The Senpai with widely contrasting personalities was born as a result of that thought process, but I had a lot of fun while writing about her. I hope I was able to properly express that through my writing.

To tell you the truth, I too have longed for a 『Senpai whom I am close to』.

The reason being, I had absolutely no interactions with the students in higher grades during my school life.

I wonder why that was so when I think back on those days, but the fact is that I have no memories of any such interactions.

I participated in clubs at school, and I remember interacting with my juniors. However, no matter how much I ransack my memories, I can't remember talking to my seniors at all.

Does this mean that I had some extremely traumatic experience that is causing my brain to unconsciously seal away all related memories....?

Once those memories are unlocked, will a mysterious beauty wearing a black coat appear before me and say something like, "So you finally remembered. I am your Senpai. At last, the promised time has come" and cause my dormant supernatural abilities to awaken.....?

After that, will I end up participating in a large-scale battle with the fate of the Earth on the line....?

While I was thinking about stuff like that, I started to become overly excited. Awaken quickly, my memories with my Senpai!

Well, putting such obviously unrealistic scenarios aside, I really don't know why I don't have any such memories. Someone, please tell me if you know the reason.

Still, If I had a person older than me, especially a beautiful girl who would cheerfully give me advice about my studies and my private life, I might froth at the mouth and pass out before finding words to describe my feelings.

In any case, talking about my delusions any further is pointless, so I would like to move on to giving thanks.

N-sama, my old editor, and S-sama, my new editor. Thank you for patiently

putting up with this story that has a relatively simplistic setting. I am especially indebted to you for helping me create Senpai's character.

Kodama Yuu-sama, who drew the illustrations. To be honest, this is the first time I've worked with a person whom I have already worked with before, so it feels kind of strange. The lively character designs were amazing, and especially the illustrations with Senpai showing her different personalities were very cute. Thank you so much.

All the people who sent me messages from every quarter. Reading your impressions makes me feel that I am really alive, after all. Really, I can't thank you all enough.

And finally, a big thank you to all the readers who read this book.

I hope that we can meet again.

Sorano Kazuki

PS: Please check out my other book that released in November under HJ Bunko: 『What happens when a workaholic sorcerer starts living with a cute wife? "Yes, I'm very happy!"』